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BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

**Unity in Diversity
Cultures, Religions and
Church Impacting Society**

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Cultures, Religions and Church Impacting Society

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Editorial

The missionary prayer of the Lord, “that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17: 22-23) has often provoked reflection and discussion on the pages of the *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*. The current issue, unity in diversity, draws attention to the complexity of cultures, religions and churches that are often the source of conflict in a country like Nigeria; these could become a major force for the transformation of our society.

Three contributions in this issue of the *Bulletin* address the complex roles diverse cultural practices and religions play in a country like Nigeria. Instead of endangering communal peace or provoking oppression, contributors argue, they have the potential, based on their spiritual thrust and mission, to recreate human understanding, unity and wellbeing. Moses Afamefule Chukwujekwu presents a vision of the Church’s mission in Paul’s letter to the Galatians that affirms the *cultural autonomy of the evangelised*. He argues that Paul, a man of dialogue in full fellowship with the apostles who preceded him and very respectful of each context, embraced a missionary strategy that displays the vocation of a church that is characterized by unity-in-diversity. On her part, focusing on Igbo society and culture, as narrated in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Caroline Mbonu carefully weaves gender, culture, African traditional religion and the Christian church into a force for liberation. She highlights the liberative potential of womanist spirituality embedded in traditional religion using *mgbala* as organizational metaphor: i.e. the hearth that is not merely a fireplace but the very soul of the household. She shows how *mgbala* restructures our understanding of Igbo society; its retrieval could enable reconstruction and new understanding of liberation of women and men. Finally, Marinus Iwuchukwu presents the familiar story of Muslim-Muslim and Muslim-Christian conflict in particular states of Nigeria. He argues that the Scriptures and theological resources of the two religions

point another way: toward a prophetic mission of peace and reconciliation that is realizable through the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action.

On his part Gabriel Mendy develops a theology of the Church from the perspective of the North African Father, Saint Augustine. The interest of Mendy's research, following the insight of Saint Augustine, is to highlight the imperative role of the Holy Spirit in establishing communion within the Church and among various particular Churches. Mendy argues that this role of the Holy Spirit that is not strongly stressed in ecclesiology has positive and far-reaching implications for all aspects of the Church's unity, life, and mission.

The two final contributions fall within the section that the *Bulletin* devotes to *Features*. Both deal with synodality in the Church. The second synod of bishops for Africa held in Rome, October 2009, created a context of learning for Bishops, auditors, and other participants to reflect on a new sense of reconciliation with God and with humans. Paulinus Odozor's paper shows how the synod was a search for creative ways by which the church would serve as leaven in society so as to fulfil its reconciling mission as salt of the earth and light of the world. Urgent issues that the synod considered necessary to move the Church and world forward were contained in propositions sent to the Pope. These include a servant and witnessing church, good leadership in society and church, the role of women and their impact in church and society, and certain toxic influences that affect African societies. On his part Emeka Ngwoke shares experiences of the synod in the diocese of Nsukka that held May 2010. The dominant argument of his paper is that the church of Nigeria, in general, and Enugu State in particular (e.g. the Church in Nsukka diocese), has a prophetic role of impacting the Nigerian society in its search for democratic rule. The Church performs this task by being the conscience of society to transform the macro and micro social units.

Elochukwu Uzukwu C.S.Sp.

Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka

Gospel, Church and Cultures: Pauline Perspective in the Letter to the Galatians¹

By

Moses-Valentine Afamefuna Chukwujekwu, Ph. D.

Introduction

In the early times of the Church, Paul, a “*church persecutor-converted-evangeliser*”, became a name that could not be done away with in what concerned the mission of bringing the Gospel of Christ to bear especially among those living in the Gentile territories. In response to his personal encounter with Christ, Paul understood himself to be called for, and effectively became the chief protagonist of the mission to the Gentiles. However his ministry of spreading the good news of Christ among the non-Jewish nations was met with many difficulties, among which was prominent and thorny the issue of harmonising the faith and the religio-cultural sensibility of the early Jewish Christians with those of their Gentile counterparts. This was one of the major issues that threatened the ecclesial communion and unity and even questioned the authenticity of Paul’s apostleship. Questions arose as to whether it was necessary for the Gentiles to become Jews first by means of the rite of circumcision, and thus pledge to observe the Jewish laws, before they could be fully incorporated into the body of the believers in Christ, that is, into the Church, the *corpus* of those destined for salvation.

¹ This present article is culled from doctoral dissertation of the author presented at the Faculty of Theology of Lugano, Switzerland (September, 2008) and published with the title: *That I might preach Him among the Nations: Paul’s Vocation and Evangelisation in Africa Today, with Special Reference to Igboland, Nigeria – An Appraisal of Gal 1:1-2:10*, Verlag im Internet-dissertation.de, Berlin 2009. The author holds also Master of Advanced Studies in Intercultural Communication from the University of Lugano, Switzerland (2005).

By means of the narration of his experience of Christ and of his vocation to the apostleship which followed, Paul shows in Galatians how he came to the certainty that he was extraordinarily *called* and specifically *chosen* to bring the good news *of* Christ and *about* Christ to the Gentiles. This certainty, as he leaves the reader to understand, matured in him a special perception of what the Gospel of Christ *is* and *how* it should operate as it is brought to people of Gentile provenances. He attributes his call to a *special* revelation of Christ which at the same time conferred on him the *special* mission of evangelisation of the Gentiles. Thus in a fiery manner he defends this call to the apostleship and *a fortiori* the Gospel he preached among the Gentiles.

Nonetheless he showed himself a man of dialogue and the issue was referred for discussion with the early Church leaders in Jerusalem. By means of frank dialogue and mutual respect of the Spirit-derived diverse manners of spreading the same good news of Christ, a solution to the problem was found and an agreement reached upon. This gave credence to Paul's vocation as apostle and to his missionary strategy, without diminishing, jeopardising or denigrating those of the earlier Apostles, guaranteeing what today we could call *the cultural autonomy of the evangelised*. Nevertheless Paul believes, in all and above all, that the inalienable transforming and recreating power of the Gospel and the invaluable necessity of Christian charity and solidarity should hold sway among the various missionary propensities.

This defence of Paul's apostleship and Gospel in Galatians has been analysed and appraised by different scholars from different perspectives. We would like to view it from the perspective of the relationship between Gospel, Church and Culture. We would like to examine here the Pauline argumentation in Galatians in defence of his apostleship and Gospel with the view of deciphering how this could foster the cause of inculturation, that is, how the text could be evoked as a biblical paradigm to justify the need for effective inculturation of the one Gospel of Christ among various peoples and what this really entails. The aim is to

establish that the Pauline contention in Galatians could serve as a veritable springboard for understanding the unity-in-diversity that should characterise Christian vocation and mission. But first of all let us examine briefly what was at stake and what prompted in the first place Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Paul defends his Apostleship and Gospel

Majority of exegetes and biblical scholars believe and hold that the letter to the Galatians was written by Paul to defend his vocation and Gospel. The issue, it was supposed, was that some Christian preachers of Jewish origin came to the region of Galatia – as they probably did in the other Gentile regions – to inform the people who had already come to faith in Christ through the missionary efforts of Paul, that Paul was not a true apostle, because he was not chosen by Christ himself and that whatever he taught them was false or rather a diluted form of the Gospel. They must have probably argued also that Paul was not among the Twelve and therefore should in no way claim the right to apostleship. This challenge on the apostleship of Paul was presented by Bruce thus:

We should probably be right in inferring from Paul's emphatic language that his Galatian converts had been given a different account of his apostleship – an account which maintained that he had no commission apart from what he had received from men who had been Christian leaders before him whether the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church or the Christian leaders of Damascus or Antioch: even if his commission could be traced back ultimately to Christ, it was transmitted through these leaders.²

² F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Hendrickson, Peabody (Massachusetts) 1993, p. 72.

The questioning of Paul's apostleship led to the questioning of the authenticity of the Gospel he was preaching to the Gentiles. At the centre of discussion was then the issue of the circumcision of the Gentile converts. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation and was an indispensable requirement for incorporation into the Jewish people and *a fortiori* into the Jewish religion (Cf. Gen 17:1ff). According to the laws guiding the *Gentile* conversion to the Jewish faith, circumcision was one of *the* requirements.

We must note here that Christianity started as part of Jewish religion or rather as the expression of the accomplishment of the Jewish messianic hopes. Thus the earliest Christians were Jews and came to the Christian faith with their Jewish background and socio-cultural and religious baggage, for the simple fact that they believed and held that Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited Messiah. The core point of the Jewish messianic hopes was that the Kingdom of God will irrupt on earth through the coming of the Messiah and he will thus usher in a new age. It is evident that Paul shared this belief when he writes in Galatians that Christ gave up himself to redeem us sinful men from this present evil age (Gal 1: 4). However, many Jews, before and at the time of Paul, did not believe that Jesus was the Christ and thus persecuted those who held such belief. Before his encounter with the Risen Lord and his consequent call to apostleship, Paul counted among the chief persecutors of the nascent Church. It was eventually due to this persecution of Christians, that Christianity later came to be practised as a separate religion.

Through the missionary efforts of these Jewish Christians – here Paul merits a special kudos and recognition – many Gentiles were also converted to Christianity. But as the number of Gentile converts grew, a scorching problem ensued between some Jewish members of the Christian faith and their Gentile counterparts. Of course Jewish messianism believes that Gentiles could be incorporated into the people of God, but only on the ground that they profess the Jewish faith, accept the Jewish Law and pledge to

accomplish its requirements. This belief was not abrogated in the minds of Jews after accepting that Jesus was the Christ. One could even say that it was because of their belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited Messiah that they wanted to hold on to the provisions of the messianic expectation, which included the requirement of circumcision for the Gentiles before they could be incorporated into the people of God.

These protagonists of the Jewish religious and socio-cultural perspective are designated by NT scholars as *Judaisers*. By this, it is intended those who were hell-bent in preserving the Jewish socio-religious sensibility and practices even among Gentile converts to the Christian faith. Among other things, these so-called *Judaisers* upheld that the Gentiles who converted to Christianity should undergo the rite of circumcision and *thus* observe all the other Jewish laws and practices before they could be considered full-fledged members and partakers of the salvation wrought in and through Christ or could be fully incorporated into the community of Christ's faithful, the Church.

In Acts 15:1, Luke writes: "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved'". This contention of the *Judaisers* – which from the Galatian experience we could suppose was carried out not only in the Church in Antioch but also in many other Gentile Churches –, generated among the members of the Church, especially those in the Gentile territories long discussions, rifts and quarrels. Some Gentile converts appeared to have agreed to or better still, to have succumbed to this, probably believing that, since the Jews were the elect-people of God and Christ was the Messiah long awaited by the Jews, it does mean that for one to attain salvation, one must first of all become a Jew. Some others, from all indications, disagreed; holding that coming to faith in Christ has annulled the OT requirements for the incorporation into the Jewish people of God. Moreover, the Church, formed through the Gospel of Christ, gained through this Gospel a universal identity and can be at home among any people of any culture. For them, there is no need to

impose a practice foreign and strange to the socio-cultural sensibility of the Gentile converts or to any other peoples. Christ has made of the Jews and Gentiles one new people of God and faith in him is the common denominator of this new people of God.

This latter, as it shows, was the argument of Paul and his cohort and, as he himself pointed out in Gal 2:5, he was diehard in defending this position, which he understood as the real truth of the Gospel of Christ. These two opposing positions, however, brought serious tensions in the Christian assemblies and threatened the unity among the believers (Jews and Gentiles) in Christ. It was not easy to reach a compromise. There came then the need to have recourse to the Church leaders in Jerusalem. So it was decided that the “pillars” of the Church in Jerusalem (James, Peter and John, Gal 2:9)³ should be consulted or rather the case be presented before them to obtain their opinion. According to the Lucan account, this decision to consult the Church leaders in Jerusalem was taken by the assembly of the faithful of Antioch in Syria: “This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2). Paul, in his account, does not give hint to this common decision of the Church in Antioch but just mentioned that he went up to Jerusalem following a revelation (*kata apokálypsin*, Gal 2:2) to lay *his* Gospel before the pillars (Gal 2:1-2) – after going to Jerusalem fourteen years earlier to see Peter at the occasion in which he also saw James (Gal 1:18-19). Whichever be the case, the important thing decipherable from both accounts is the issue of dialogue and deliberation with regards to finding a solution to ecclesiastical issues. This problem was eventually discussed in what is known today as the Jerusalem Council (Gal 2:1-10; Acts 15:4-29).

³ Acts seems to recognise only Peter (Ac 15:7-11) and James (Ac 15:13-21) as the “pillars”.

As Paul recounts in Gal 2:7-8, the “pillar” apostles saw reason with him and recognised his special call to evangelise the Gentiles. They did this after perceiving that the same grace of God for evangelisation which was at work in Peter and the earlier apostles was also given to Paul for his special mission to the Gentiles. They interpreted this grace as the ground for justifying the “type” of Gospel Paul was preaching. In this way, they recognised as authentic the no-circumcision Gospel which characterised Paul’s evangelisation. The “pillars” – Paul was proud to note –, therefore, based on the recognition of the grace of God in him and God’s choice of him as the special apostle to the Gentiles, did not impose other things either on Paul himself or on his Gentile converts. They only urged him and his collaborators to continue to hold the rein of Christian charity and solidarity (Gal 2:10).

Gospel, Church and Cultures

It is important to note that Paul’s contention in Galatians on the inadmissibility of imposing the rite of circumcision and other Jewish practices on Gentiles who become Christians, of course, is not particularly because he is against circumcision *per se*, nor because he believes that the other Jewish practices and laws are of no value. For him, it is fundamentally because these Gentiles are not Jews and therefore should not be forced to become Jews or make circumcision the gateway to entering into the new people of God, the Church.

In this vein, Luke reports that Paul even circumcised his close companion Timothy, who was of a Jewish mother and Gentile father (Cf. Acts 16:1-3), but he did not do the same with Titus (of both Gentile parents) who was one of his closest collaborators. He even stated in Galatians that nobody raised the issue of Titus being uncircumcised during the meeting in Jerusalem with the pillar apostles and nobody tried imposing the rite on him (Gal 2:3). To buttress the fact that he was not actually against

circumcision or the other Jewish practices as such, Paul, in Gal 5:11, asks a rhetorical question: "If I am still preaching circumcision, why are they still persecuting me." These texts help to give evidence to the fact that Paul was not opposed to circumcision as a practice, but was opposed to its being imposed on the Gentiles, since for him, the practice has no immediate salvific value for those who are in Christ and the Gentiles should not be belaboured with the practice or let their consciences be troubled for rejecting it. The only channel of belonging to the people of God is faith in Christ; whoever has faith, whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised *could* be saved; such a person belongs through faith to the Church of God (*ekklesia tou Theou*). It is in this sense that Harink interprets Paul as meaning that "through Christ the Gentiles were acceptable to God as Gentiles."⁴

From Pauline contention in Galatians, therefore, one could decipher in Paul, so to say, the zeal against the *imposition* of the Jewish *culture* on the people of other cultures. He employs verbs that are highly suggestive of this perception: *anagkazô* – "to constrain"; "to force to do"; "to oblige" (Gal 2:3); *katadouloô* – "to enslave" (Gal 2:4); *prosanatithêmi* – "to add upon;" "to surcharge" (Gal 2:6). On one hand, Paul does not mince words in describing the amount of energy and determination with which he (and probably his other companions, especially Barnabas) combated the moves by the circumcision party (the *Judaisers*) to "impose" circumcision on his Gentile converts (Gal 2:5). But on the other hand, we must admit, he may not have intended to impart to the Galatians the idea or give them the impression that embracing the Christian faith does not challenge in any way the established cultural practices which formed hitherto part of the traditional heritage of the evangelised. Quite on the contrary! For even the very letter to the Galatians suggests that Paul, in his missionary endeavours, was actually advocating for a change, a

⁴ D. HARINK, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids (Michigan) 2003, p. 226.

conversion (*metanoia*) and not just a straightforward march into the Christian faith with “bag and baggage” of all cultural and traditional paraphernalia.

For example, in Gal 4:8-11, Paul urges the Galatians not to go back to their old way of life which involves, among other things, serving “weak and miserable elements” (*ta asthenê kai ptôcha stoicheia*). Here, Paul is referring to the divinities (gods) which he considers as “no (real) gods” (*mê ousin theois*, Gal 4:8b; Cf. also 1 Thess 1:9). In Rom 1:18-32, calling on the Gentiles to the true faith, true conversion and true communion of all believers, Paul vilifies the Gentiles by pointing out the religio-cultural elements which, prior to their believing in Christ, held them captives. It is not implausible to suppose that by this vilification Paul is actually inviting the Gentile converts to a change of heart and to a strong adherence to the new life into which they have entered through their faith in Christ.

And in line with what he says in the above cited Gal 4: 8b-11, Paul, particularly in Rom 1:23, indicts the Gentiles for exchanging “the glory of the immortal God (*ten doxan tou aphthartou Theou*) for an imitation, for the image of a mortal human being, or of birds, or animals, or crawling things”. Evidently, he expects his converts, as true believers in Christ to abandon such practices and beliefs. Harink thinks therefore of Paul’s contestation as a cultural service to the Gentiles and thus states:

It is that kind of cultural ‘service’ on the part of the Gentiles that will lead to the creation of one people of God in full mutual communion, while at the same time honoring the theologically warranted and sustained cultural difference.⁵

Several other Pauline texts make it clear that Paul believes that he who comes to faith in Christ, that is, he who accepts the Gospel as he preaches it, becomes, *a fortiori*, a new creature (Cf. 2 Cor 5:17-

⁵ HARINK, *Paul among the Postliberals*, p. 225.

21; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4f; Col 1:19ff.; Eph 2:15).⁶ This, in the final analysis, is to be read from the optics of Paul's personal experience of newness. On this, Buscemi writes:

The change in Paul was something very radical: when he encountered Christ, he became a 'new creature'. God, irrupting in his life by means of Christ, determined in him a new creation, qualitatively and radically different.⁷

This idea of becoming a new creation by an act of God, we must note, is not strictly and exclusively Pauline. It is a theme that is found in several other biblical passages and could be perceived as a vestige of Jewish religious convictions with regard to the salvific works of the Messiah. It is thus deeply rooted in the messianic expectation and is understood as a feature of the new age to be brought about by the definitive irruption of the kingdom of God on earth.⁸

Writing, therefore, to the Galatians that Christians (Paul uses 'us') – which means, including the Galatian converts themselves – are rescued from this age by Christ “who gave himself for our sins (*hyper tôn hamartiôn hêmôn*) to liberate us from this present wicked world (*hopôs exelêtai hêmas ek tou aiônos tou enestôtos ponêrou*), in accordance with the will of our God and Father” (Gal 1:3) – meaning, of course implicitly, that Christ has ushered in the new age –, Paul clearly indicates to the Galatians that they are thus called to *the new life of this new age* in Christ. This newness of life, which is the fruit of conversion (*metanoia*), entails, among other things, a change in the religious mentality and traditional religio-cultural practices that are not compatible with the belief in Christ. Effectively, it involves a kind

⁶ The idea of 'new creation' wrought by and in Christ is also found in other NT texts like: 2 Pt 3:13; Apoc 21:1.

⁷ A. M. BUSCEMI, *San Paolo. Vita, Opera, Messaggio*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 1997, p. 45.

⁸ Cf. D. S. RUSSELL, *Apocalittica giudaica*, Paideia, Brescia 1991, p. 334.

of 'chiselling out' of aspects of traditional religious practices incongruent with the salvation offered by faith in Christ and the message of the Gospel of Christ. We do think therefore that it would be wrong to believe that Paul's missionary strategy – which from the text of Galatians seems to bear upon 'respect' for the traditional culture of the evangelised–, signifies advocating absolutely the maintenance of their religious and cultural *status quo ante evangelium tout court*.

But in what lies then, one could ask, the merit of Paul's argument in Galatians, when considered from the perspective of the Gospel of Christ moving from Jewish cultural milieu to the Gentile cultural milieu? How would one appreciate Paul's argument from the point of view of the harmonious meeting of the Gospel (born in Jewish cultural milieu) with other cultures? The merit, we are inclined to think, lies in calling the Galatians out of the 'apparent' belief or perception that all the Jewish religio-cultural heritage, especially the rite of circumcision, are necessary for them to be able to participate in the saving work of Christ. It hinges also upon his insisting firmly with his Jewish brothers that, for peoples foreign to Jewish culture, no Jewish cultural feature should be *imposed* upon them or retained as a condition for their entering into God's salvific retinue. It could, nevertheless, be assumed, as does Harink, that:

Paul's convictions about the apocalyptic theological significance of Jesus included the conviction that those Gentiles who believed his message about Jesus and through him came to worship the one God of Israel were now fully members of Abraham's family⁹.

In connection with this blessing of Abraham which is also promised to the Gentiles as well (Gen 12:3; 18:18)¹⁰, Winger asks:

⁹ HARINK, *Paul among the Postliberals*, p. 218.

¹⁰ Cf. G. FAVARO, *Il dialogo interreligioso*, Queriniana, Brescia 2002, pp. 121-122.

“If we suppose that Paul used Scripture to acquaint the Galatians with God’s dealings with humanity, what would have been more apt to his purpose than the stories of Abraham?”¹¹ This rhetorical question makes us believe that Winger is strongly of the opinion that Paul, effectively, may have used the OT to argue his preaching among the Galatians. Thinking of what could have been the argumentation of Paul’s ‘opponents’ in Galatia, Winger holds that what Paul rejects in the letter to the Galatians is the type of Gospel preached by the ‘troublemakers’ at Galatia which probably states among other things that the Gentiles could share of Abraham’s blessing and the salvific blessings of Christ “only when they cease to be Gentiles,”¹² by submitting to circumcision. But for Paul, the Gentiles *could* and *should* remain Gentiles and be saved. However, they should be called out of their “existing culture” to build up a people of new culture, not *necessarily different* from the former but *substantially divergent* from it and a renewed form of it.¹³ We note, therefore, that in Galatians, Paul puts strong emphasis on the word “impose” which boils down to the denial of the freedom of the children of God in which Paul strongly believed (Gal 2:4). Apart from Gal 2:3, Paul uses the verb also in Gal 2:14 and 6:12. In 6:12, just as in 2:3 the verb has to do with “circumcision”, while in 2:14 it is attached to the amorphous and polyvalent infinitive “*Ioudaizein*” – literally = to judaize (to make one live like a Jew). Evidently, this verb signifies among other things “to be circumcised”.

In other words, Paul seems to uphold that the Gospel of Christ could implant itself or find expression in any cultural milieu without necessarily suffering the overbearing transfer of the cultural heritage of one who brings the Gospel. In this, actually, lies the universal dimension of the Church, expressed in the person and

¹¹ M. WINGER, “Act One: Paul arrives at Galatia”, *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002), 548-567: p. 565.

¹² M. WINGER, “Tradition, Revelation and Gospel: A Study in Galatians”, *Journal of Study of the New Testament* 53 (1994), 65-86: p.78, note 47.

¹³ Cf. HARKIN, *Paul among the Postliberals*, pp. 235-236.

actions of Christ.¹⁴ By this understanding, however, we do not intend to signify that Paul considers the Gospel as an abstract reality that has nothing to do with the sociologico-existential aspects of human life. For every human being is a product of nature and nurture!¹⁵ Every human being is thus a product of culture(s), although no human being *is* or should hold himself or herself *to be* a cultural clone. And it goes without saying that religion is part and parcel of culture, or better still, and as Scola puts it, “the heart of every culture.”¹⁶ This boils down to the fact that in no way could one dissect his being and his existence from the cultural realities that shaped him or her. We believe that neither the transmission nor the acceptance of the Christian faith with its universality modules, of course, might have been able or may be able still to change this situation! If this is taken therefore into consideration, we are led to the supposition that not even Paul, in his avowed openness to other peoples and readiness to adapt to and navigate in many cultural vicissitudes (1Cor 9:19-23), could have preached the Gospel without it being founded upon some traits of his cultural heritage. If not for anything, the abundant use of the OT in his letters is a confirmation that Paul did not completely dissociate himself from his religious past which formed part and parcel of his cultural baggage. In other words, since Paul was a product of his cultural milieu which has traditions and customs imbued with religious mentality of his people, he himself could not have transmitted a Gospel completely free of all cultural accoutrements¹⁷.

Viewed from another perspective, it is also supposed that Paul's contention is not that the Jewish Christians should become and live like Gentile Christians. In Galatians, Paul was only

¹⁴ For a brief consideration of the universal dimension of the Church, see A. SCOLA, *Chi è la Chiesa? Una chiave antropologica e sacramentale per l'ecclesiologia*, Queriniana, Brescia 2005, pp. 179-181.

¹⁵ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 53.

¹⁶ SCOLA, *Chi è la Chiesa?*, p. 113.

¹⁷ Cf. also J. B. METZ, “Unità e pluralità. Problemi e prospettive dell'inculturazione”, *Concilium* 25 (1989), 686-697: pp. 689-690.

contending that the Gentile Christians should not become Jews first in order to validate their insertion into the Christian fold. Like mentioned above, he was not in any way depreciating or disparaging all his local Jewish customs and beliefs.¹⁸ For Harink: “Paul nowhere suggests that *Jews* should reject their Torah observance, and in fact, seems to assume that they would and should remain committed to it.”¹⁹ The fundamental error of the School of Tübingen founded by Christian Ferdinand Baur (1792-1860) – which the contemporary Pauline scholarship tries to debunk – is the belief that the radical change wrought in Paul by his Christ-Encounter engendered in him a total and uncompromising opposition to his Jewishness and whatever it entails.

Among exegetes today, this view is being corrected. For in many apologetic statements in his letters, Paul even boasts – this is a bit paradoxical – of his Jewish credentials and heritage, among which is, of course, being circumcised on the 8th day (Cf., for example, 2Cor 11:21-22; Phil 3:5-6).²⁰ In his letters he draws abundantly from his Jewish heritage to buttress his points. It may appear, however, that in these texts, especially that of the letter to the Philippians, that Paul was merely being satirical about the value of his Jewish credentials, since he, immediately, adds that he has considered these as refuse because of Christ (Cf. Phil 3:7-9). In our opinion the renunciation of what is of value does not immediately denude the thing of the value inherent in it. Concerning this Dunn writes:

But the fact that Paul could so present himself nevertheless indicates that he had not wholly turned his back on his

¹⁸ H. BOERS, “We who by are by Inheritance Jews; not from the Gentiles, Sinners”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992), 273-281: pp. 278-279.

¹⁹ HARINK, *Paul among the Postliberals*, p. 219. Harink makes reference to Gal 5:3, 1 Cor 7:17-20, Ac 21:17-24.

²⁰ J. D. G. DUNN, “Who did Paul think he was: A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity”, *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), 174-193.

Hebrew identity, and more positively, that he was ready to affirm his continuing identity with his people's roots and ancient beginnings.²¹

Or as Hays puts it, for Paul, "the Gospel confirms the Torah".²² Thus, Paul's 'renunciation' of his Jewish credentials because of Christ does not imply that he wants to signify that these credentials are not credentials at all. Otherwise, he would not have referred to them in any way as the source of his '*constrained*' boasting. Moreover, this Jewish heritage is undeniably the very foundation upon which the messianico-salvific faith in Jesus of Nazareth is built.²³

Furthermore, this our conviction that Paul does not intend to do a blanket sweeping off of his Jewish past is informed by the apparently palatable position he took in the letter to the Romans. In this letter, Paul extols among other things, the value of the covenant, the Law and the election of Israel, insisting, however, that that should not constitute the reason for excluding the Gentiles from the salvation in Christ.²⁴

In reference to this point, Dunn makes an interesting observation between the appellation "Jew" and the appellation "Israel." For him, Paul uses the former when he speaks of his people in relation to other nations while the latter he uses to signify God's relation with his people. Dunn thinks that Paul did this

²¹ DUNN, "Who Did Paul Think He Was?" p. 187.

²² R. B. HAYS, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London 1989, p. 55.

²³ For further discussions on this, see V. FUSCO, *Le prime comunità cristiane. Tradizioni e tendenze nel cristianesimo delle origini*, EDB, Bologna 1995, pp. 246-253. There is a recent document by the Magisterium on the inexorable link between the OT and NT. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Bible*, Vatican City, 24 May 2001; Cf. also WINGER, "Act One: Paul arrives in Galatia", pp. 560-561.

²⁴ Cf. DUNN, "Who did Paul think he was", p. 188; See B. J. OROPEZA, "Paul and Theodicy: Intertextual Thoughts on God's Justice and Faithfulness to Israel in Romans 9-11", *New Testament Studies* 53 (2007), 57-80.

deliberately, upholding one (“Israel”) and disparaging the other (“Jew”).²⁵ In our opinion, there may not have been any reason for Paul to use such distinctions in writing because as his other letters show (Phil 3:6; 2Cor 11:22), he was not according any direct pejorative sense to the appellation “Jew”. For Hays:

Paul, speaking from *within* the Jewish tradition, contends that the Torah itself provides the warrant for a more inclusive theology that affirms that the one God is God of Gentiles as well as Jews and that Abraham is the forefather of more than those who happen to be his physical descendants.²⁶

Paul’s argument in Galatians, even though it has much more to do with the Jews not forcing the Gentiles to become Jews in order to gain salvation in Christ, does not, on the other hand, refuse to the Jews also the right to remain Jews and still earn the salvation in Christ. For this to take place, Paul believes, there should be a theological shift with regard to circumcision even among the Jews: instead of “physical” circumcision, the circumcision of the heart should be more emphasised.²⁷ But that does not mean that those who opt for physical circumcision should be condemned or excluded since Abrahamic covenant is not abrogated but fulfilled in Christ.

How then do we understand and appreciate Paul’s contention in Galatians? Does it not boil down to Paul cutting the branch on which he is sitting? We think that Paul’s contention is based on making Galatians realise the freedom they enjoy as believers in Christ. Versepunt puts it this way:

Paul employs the story of his own independent calling and career to defend neither his right to preach the Gospel nor

²⁵ DUNN, “Who did Paul think he was”, pp. 189-190.

²⁶ HAYS, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, p. 55.

²⁷ Cf. Rom 2:28.29; Cf. also Jer 9:25.

his authority over the Galatian church, but to support the validity of his converts' salvation without incorporation into the ranks of Jewish Christendom²⁸.

To convince the Galatians of his present stance, therefore, Paul does not hesitate in evoking what he was and did in the past in relation to the tradition of his forefathers (Gal 1:14). Evidently, by making reference to his past, which from all indications coincides somehow with what the 'troublemakers' (to use Paul's own words) in Galatia (Cf. Gal 1:7) were applying all efforts to arrive at, Paul is simply indicating that his present contention on behalf of the Galatians is geared against their being forced to accept circumcision and this is, in some sense, a kind of *plaidoyeur* for their liberty. This is highly informed by Paul's own personal experience of Christ and his power to transform lives.

In this way Gaventa believes that Paul's reference to his past is a presentation of his experience as paradigmatic. She writes:

This paradigmatic dimension is accomplished by the repetition of the theme of the Gospel's singularity, the in-breaking of revelation, and the insistence on the Gospel's reversal of prior value-systems.... Paul sees in his experience an example of the Gospel's power and employs that example for the exhortation of others²⁹

Put differently, Paul is trying to bring his readers to recognise that he himself, before his call, was somehow a victim of *cultural-clone-mentality*. He was so filled with zeal for the defence of what the *Judaisers* now seem to be defending so much so that he was ready to put to death those who went contrary to it. This argument,

²⁸ D. J. VERSEPUT, "Paul's Gentile Mission and the Jewish Christian Community: A Study of the Narrative in Galatians 1 and 2", *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993), 36-58: p.38.

²⁹ B. R. GAVENTA, "Galatians 1 and 2: Autobiography as Paradigm", *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1986), 309-326: p. 326.

we think, is meant to impress in the mind of Galatians the fact that Paul's perception of his culture and tradition changed or rather was redirected *only* when he encountered Christ and received the commission to make him known among the Gentiles.

Tacing another line of thinking, we feel that Paul's contention is also geared towards making the Jews understand the transitory (though *not unimportant*) role their election, and, *a fortiori*, their religio-cultural practices, played in the economy of salvation. Paul develops further this point in Galatians with the metaphor of the Law as pedagogue (Cf. Gal 3:19-4:7). We must not forget that at the NT times, circumcision had become the unflinching mark of distinction for the Jews. One could say that at that time the Jewishness of a Jew depended much on the rite of circumcision. And there are socio-political and historical factors that garnered this type of perception in the mind of the Jews. That is why at that time the proselytes who came to adhere to Jewish religious beliefs and thus to their religio-cultural practices were made to become Jews first by accepting the rite of circumcision.³⁰

This perception in Judaism of the *route-to-salvation* which people of other nations and therefore of other cultures should 'necessarily' ply, held sway even among some Jews who embraced the faith in Jesus as the Christ. But Paul, after his *extraordinary* experience of Christ and his consequent call to evangelise the Gentiles, challenges this perception in Galatians and tries to impart both to his fellow Jewish Christians and their Gentile counterparts the conviction that peoples of all cultures who come to the faith in Christ attain a full-fledged membership of the community of believers, the Church (Cf. Gal 3:27-28). And according to V. Fusco, this faith brings all peoples into a new family *of* and *for*

³⁰ Ex 12:48 speaks of the circumcision a foreigner who wants to partake of the Jewish Paschal meal. But the requirement is only clearly mentioned in the Mishnah (ca. 200 AD). Whether it was already in vogue at the Pauline times is still a matter of scholarly debates. However, it is plausible it was already there because Tacitus (ca. 58- ca. 120 AD) mentions it in his *Historiae* 5, 5:2.

God.³¹ Therefore, the Gentiles who have faith in Christ should not be troubled with fulfilling the requirement of circumcision and other Jewish laws and practices that attached to being circumcised.³²

Conclusion

Two things crystallise out from what we have discussed in this article. On one hand, in the letter to the Galatians, Paul is not contending that his Gentile converts should be left untouched with all their cultural bag and baggage as they come into the Christian faith. He believes and upholds that faith in Christ should operate a radical change in a person who accepts it and make the person a new creature. This faith in Christ should challenge the socio-cultural and religious heritage of the converted that is not in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel of Christ. But on the other hand, Paul is contending that no religious, social or cultural burden should be laid upon these converts as a pre-condition for participating in the saving works of Christ.

Appraising these Pauline genuine contentions, one may be tempted to think that they basically lead to a position of 'either...or', thus signifying that either of Paul's contentions could not hold water. This puts the interpreter of Pauline missionary strategy and conviction before a hard-shelled paradox. The consequence could be described thus: It is either that the work of preaching the Gospel to every creature of every culture with the continued consequence of being characterised by the '*he-who-blows-the-pipe-dictates-the-tune*' syndrome holds sway if the desired 'conversion' is to take place, or that peoples who have not known Christ continue to dwell under the aegis of their traditional religious and cultural practices and be deprived of Christ and hence of taking part in the universal salvation wrought by and in Christ. We must remark firmly that neither one nor the other is palatable to

³¹ Cf. FUSCO, *Le prime comunità cristiane*, p. 250.

³² FUSCO, *Le prime comunità cristiane*, pp. 250-251.

contemporary Christian missionary consciousness. If Paul were arguing, as we have tried to understand, that the Gospel should be preached to the Gentiles as Gentiles and of course that they should be allowed to receive the Gospel as Gentiles, it does mean, of course, that he understands the Gospel of Christ as something that stands *over* and *above* any socio-cultural appurtenance.³³ It does however mean that the Gospel is capable of transforming the Gentiles and their culture from within; it is not and should not be attached to any culture or peoples.

Evidently it is this conviction that Pope Paul VI expresses in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975) when he wrote:

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.³⁴

But the problem remains: how could one who has embraced the Gospel be able to transmit it to others, especially those outside one's cultural milieu without running the risk of transmitting the Gospel as already incarnated in one's culture? In other words, how could one discern what is 'essential' to the Gospel and transmit it only without consciously or unconsciously transmitting at the same

³³ See the conclusion of TESTA, "Unità della Chiesa nel pluralism. Saggio di teologia biblica", *Liber Annuus* 42 (1992), 109-144: pp. 143-144.

³⁴ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 8 December 1975, no. 20.

time aspects of the cultural heritage in which one is formed and in which the very faith of the Gospel of Christ which one transmits is shaped? This paradox still yearns for a formidable solution!

But from the Pauline missionary strategy and his understanding of the relationship between Gospel and culture which we have summarised and analysed above, one could rightly say that Paul was a *master-inculturating evangeliser*. His struggle against the 'judaisation' of the Gentile Churches was not only to prevent his missionary efforts from being in vain (*eis kenon*, Gal 2:2), but also and especially that the truth of the Gospel might dwell and remain among the Galatians (*hina hê alêtheia tou euangelîou diameînê pros hymas*, Gal 2:5). Even though Paul, in Gal 1: 5, speaks of the Gospel he preached as the only true one – that which would have made him a fanatic if interpreted rigorously –, he holds that the modes of preaching that same Gospel are diverse (Gal 2:7-9); and all is geared towards preserving the unity and the truth of the Gospel of Christ, which is one. In this vein, one could surmise that Paul's defence in favour of the Galatians was incontestably a "stitch-in-time-that-saved-nine" both for the preservation of the liberty-of-the-children-of-God of the Galatians and for the preservation of the very truth of the Gospel which sets all men of all cultures free.

Today many biblical texts are evoked to justify the phenomenon of inculturation. There have been many scholarly works and articles on the problem of the relationship between Gospel and culture or faith and culture. Like we mentioned above, our intention here is to proffer the Galatian case as paradigmatic for the Church in attending to issues bordering on inculturation and to present the solution reached at the Jerusalem conference as a model for attaining the ecclesiastical communion between Christian faithful of different socio-cultural provenance.

In this vein, our reflection on Galatians also acts as spur for intensifying honest, open and determined dialogue on the modes of Christian mission today. Paul's defence of his vocation and Gospel in Galatians, does not only enhance and promote the cultural autonomy of the evangelised, it also highly promotes the

recognition of *unity in diversity* in matters relating to Christian vocation and mission. Although Paul assertively tells the Galatians that there is no other Gospel other than that which he preached to them and invoked a curse (*anathema*) on whoever would attempt to preach to them another Gospel (for him such does not really exist), he admits – the pillars also concurred with this conviction – that there are many ways of preaching the same Gospel to different peoples and *a fortiori*, there should be many ways of expressing³⁵ and celebrating the same faith in Christ among many peoples of different cultural heritage.

Our understanding and interpretation of Paul's contention in Galatians therefore calls for the need to make value judgements and re-evaluation of certain traditions or elements of the Christian faith hitherto formed and shaped by the Western Greco-roman culture in order to see how they could be improved and enlightened by new Christian experiences among different peoples of different cultures. This brings the Christian faith and tradition to be constantly relevant and meaningful among all peoples. In this regard, Tuckett affirms that: "Christian theology and praxis, according to Paul, must therefore be prepared to be critical of its traditions. Christian theology must maintain the freedom not to be bound to the past in a totally inflexible way."³⁶ And in reference to the celebration of the Christian liturgy, the Church is conscious of the fact that it "should correspond to the genius and culture of different peoples" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1204).

The Gospel of Christ, therefore, can be at home in any culture and among any people. This being at home does not mean accommodating or tolerating aspects of the culture that go intrinsically against the norms of the Gospel. It rather means that the modes of interpreting the salvation wrought in and through Christ to different peoples and cultures are diverse. What is

³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, 7 December 1990, no. 53.

³⁶ C. M. TUCKETT, "Paul, Tradition and Freedom", *Theologische Zeitschrift* 41 (1991), 307-325: p. 324

important is that the bringer of the Gospel does not intend to or effectively operate a blanket sweep – actually or mentally – of the socio-cultural and religious past of the people meant to be evangelised. This will amount to a religious imperialism and hegemony. Christ did not come to dominate people; he came to uplift all peoples and give every people the chance of encountering God's love, each according to modes and sensibilities proper to it.

We believe that when what Paul contends for in Galatians is viewed from this perspective, a strong foothold could be built out of the Pauline experience and convictions for the continued missionary endeavours of the Church in preaching Christ – who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8) – to all peoples of all cultures for the salvation of all.

A Retrieval of Women's Religious Experience in *Things Fall Apart*: Towards a Liberative Spirituality

By

Caroline Mbonu, HHCIJ, PhD

Abstract:

Spirituality represents a conscious involvement in the project of life integration. Spirituality offers liberative potential for women. In the context of women's advancement, spirituality touches on women's positive experience with respect to their relationship with God, others, self, and the world. As a liberative vehicle, spirituality fits well with my interest in the agency and promotion of women. Indeed, liberative actions or events unburden, lift up, or promote the humanity of persons, individually and communally. Spirituality as effecting a woman's personal agency, transformation, and commitment to social change will be the insight I seek to develop in my investigation. I employ agency to represent the human potential to think, feel and act. In this paper, I intend to utilize the insights of Chinua Achebe on women's religious experience in his book, *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe provides a window from which to view spirituality in traditional Igbo society. He portrays Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves of the land of Umuofia, in a delicate position of service and leadership. Characteristically, the social position of Chielo, a widow, places her among the traditional poor. But as priestess of the Agbala, the land of Umuofia most sacred of deities, the figure of Chielo takes on a redemptive quality. A retrieval of the complexity of the figure of Chielo together with certain elements in the Christian and Igbo religious traditions yields positive images in reconstructing women's religious and spiritual practices. Thus, the character of Chielo stands as a potential hermeneutical model that can bring to light the liberative potential of spirituality for women as well as men in contemporary Africa.

Introduction

The various social and cultural movements of the past five decades, among which the Womanist/Feminist and Liberation movements stand out, have in no small way influenced women's perceptions of themselves in society. Power management or rather the exercise of power at various levels of human endeavour constitutes a major component of these movements. The movements among other events, called into question the age-old patriarchal structures, which tended to breed and perpetuate the marginalization of peoples. Marginalization, which results from a segment of a society dominating and exploiting another segment, has been a perennial problem in the history of the formation of human societies. Strangely, religion or the sense of the sacred also has been harnessed in the service of marginalization. Religion has, however, often been employed by the dominant group or culture as an instrument that "softens for the kill." But the practice of religion, through its various forms of expression, ought to be liberative.

Undoubtedly, the role of religion in the history of humankind has been ambiguous.¹ Religion can be a source of spiritual renewal of an individual or a group. Religion can also be a source of violence. The history of the Crusades and contemporary political scene in many countries, confirms as much. Undeniably, religion can as well be the ultimate legitimator of self-interest.² Furthermore, the fundamental belief of some religious traditions sets the stage for the alienation of many of its adherents. Doctrines such as the male image of the Deity represent one such alienating factor that has proved non-liberative, especially for many contemporary women. Thus, the male image of God and the patriarchal structure that this religious traditions supports has managed to instil in women a sense of powerlessness, dependence,

¹ Marcus, Borg J., *The God we Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 114.

² Borg, *The God we Never Knew*, 114.

and distrust of their own experience, and knowledge.³ Certain structures that maintain this image of the Deity demands reconstruction for all—women and men—to realize the full benefit of the Christian message. I write as a female and a Christian and I can state that the significance of the Gospel message, for example, is fundamentally to unburden, lift up, or promote the humanity of persons, individually and communally (cf. Luke 4: 18-19). In his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe claims similar liberative stance for the Igbo religious traditions in his portrayal of Chielo, the priestess of *Agbala*, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves in the land of Umuofia. In creating a female character, a priestess of *Agbala*, Achebe pre-empts the contemporary question: How does the Igbo culture interpret the priesthood as well as handling of sacred things? In a very subtle manner, the author also reinforces the gender neutrality of the Holy God, the Transcendence, in Igbo religious tradition. That is to say, for the Igbo, the maleness of God, which dominates Christian thought, making it difficult for women to become sacred ministers, does not seem to exist. In this regard, those scholars, who claim that the maleness of God supports patriarchy, would perhaps propound a different theory to support the prevalence of patriarchal structures in traditional Igbo society. On such scholars, English Anglican Clergyman, Paul Avis states “women cannot freely worship a male God, identify with a male savior and Lord or feel at home in a community whose leaders are all male and whose liturgy still takes for granted that male humanity is the norm, generic for humanity as such.”⁴

The character of Chielo in *Things Fall Apart*, speaks of a reality that is retrievable. Although set in a novel, in reality, women in traditional Igbo life participated in leadership in sacred shrines. They handled sacred things on behalf of the community. In this regard, one can claim a healthy coexistence of matriarchy and

³ Richard Gula, *The Call to Holiness: Embracing a Fully Christian Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 137.

⁴ Avis, Paul Avis, *Eros and the Sacred* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1989), 6.

patriarchy in traditional Igbo life.⁵ Indeed, Nigerian anthropologist, Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere insisted that among the Igbo, "In matters of communal interest, a woman like a man is expected to speak her mind."⁶ Thus, a patriarchal system that is furthered by religious practices does not seem to resonate with the traditional Igbo understanding of the Transcendence. For this reason, the retrieval and reweaving of the redeeming possibility of traditional religion can support the contemporary women's quest for adult autonomy, responsibility and respect. In this paper, I argue for the liberative potential of spirituality for women as well as men. Chielo's transcendence of inhibiting social dictates of a seemingly patriarchal culture is illuminated by her role in "a woman's place"—the kitchen! This is what I will do in the four short sections that follow. First, I introduce an understanding of spirituality and spiritual practices. Second, I will offer a reading of the character of Chielo showing the liberative aspects of spiritual practices. Third, I will discuss one example each of women's spiritual practices in the Igbo religious tradition and Western spirituality that can be retrievable and made contemporaneous. Fourth, I conclude with a thought from Achebe on what I consider a significant spiritual practice in the novel *Things Fall Apart*.

Spirituality

In recent decades, a variety of ideological constructs parade as spirituality. Fundamentally, spirituality is a life lived or governed by the spirit. It is that which gives meaning to life and allows us to participate in the large whole.⁷ Spirituality means that we see all things in God and respond to God in and through all things. That is

⁵ Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, "Recovering Igbo Tradition," in *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 446-448.

⁶ Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000), 39.

⁷ John J. Shea, *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults* (New York: Bowman & Littlefield, 2005), 97.

to say, spirituality, represents a human response, an ascending gift to God's descending gift. According to an American ethicist, Richard Gula, spirituality entails a morality, a way of life; a life lived with a certain spirit.⁸ In addition, another American scholar of spirituality, Michael Downey, posits spirituality is an "ongoing realization or actualization of the human capacity to move beyond the self with others and with God."⁹ The capacity to move beyond the self with others and with God does not occur in a vacuum; this is rooted in a particular cultural context. That is to say, culture can shape spirituality and spiritual practices. In *Things Fall Apart*, the author makes the point of cultural spiritual practices mediated by a female character, Chielo, the priestess.

The Character of Chielo in *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe sets his narrative in the land of Umuofia, a cluster of nine villages on the lower Niger. Umuofia is a powerful clan, skilled in war and with a great population, with proud traditions and advanced social institutions. Okonkwo, the protagonist, has risen from nothing to a high position in the land. His father, a lazy flutist named Unoka, has many debts with people throughout the village. Unoka's life represents everything Okonkwo strives to overcome. Through hard work, Okonkwo has become a great man among his people. He has taken three wives and had a barn full of yams. He rules his family with an iron fist, struggling to demonstrate how he does not have the laziness and weakness that characterized his father, Unoka. Okonkwo is constantly disappointed by Nwoye, his first son, but he has great love for his daughter, Ezinma, his child by his second wife, Ekwefi. Ekwefi bore ten children, but only Ezinma has survived. She loves the girl fiercely. Ezinma is sickly, and sometimes Ekwefi fears that Ezinma, too, will die. Late one night, the priestess of Agbala, the powerful oracle in the land of

⁸ Gula, *The Call to Holiness*, 20-21.

⁹ Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 35.

Umuofia, Chielo, brings Ezinma with her for a spiritual encounter with the oracle. No one goes before Agbala on their own accord, "lest he strike you in his anger."¹⁰ Terrified, and determined to keep close to her only child, Ekwefi follows the priestess at a distance, fearing harm might come to her child. Okonkwo follows too, distantly. Achebe describes Chielo and her social relations thus:

In ordinary life Chielo was a widow with two children. She was very friendly with Ekwefi and they shared a common shed in the market. She was particularly fond of Ekwefi's only daughter, Ezinma, whom she called "my daughter." Quite often she brought beancakes and gave Ekwefi some to take home to Ezinma. Anyone seeing Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe she was the same person who prophesied when the spirit of Agbala was upon her.¹¹

Strikingly, Agbala is represented in the masculine gender. A male deity with a female priest!

If the measure of power or a sense of worth derives from performance of sacred duties, Chielo, the priestess of *Agbala*, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, would perhaps be the most powerful person, male or female, in the town of Umuofia. For she alone had the authority to enter the most sacred shrine in the land, its "holy of holies." But Achebe describes her as ordinary, meaning she had no elitist tendency that seems to characterize certain brand of the priesthood.

Chielo's function as priestess is not a relationship of power. Rather, her priesthood represents that of a humble servant of the people of Umuofia. The Nigerian theologian, Elochukwu Uzukwu, argues persuasively that the priesthood in Igbo religious traditions

¹⁰ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 101.

¹¹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 49.

is essentially for service.¹² Uzukwu contends that traditional spirituality or the ministry of the priests and healers are endowed with gifts for the service to the community and that ministry is not the ladder toward rank and privilege.¹³ The Native American scholar, Jace Weave, supports the argument that native religious traditions are not practiced for personal empowerment or fulfilment, but, rather, they are practiced to ensure the corporate good.¹⁴ Chielo's ministry bore comparable characteristics. The authoritarian concept of power is antithetical to the concept of service she espoused. Nothing in the text suggests that Chielo assumed the position of priestess of the nine villages of Umuofia on her own. Rather the narrative suggests a vocation, a call. Vocation can mean where your greatest gifts meet the world's greatest needs and the community verifies your call.¹⁵ Okonkwo and Ekwefi recognized this call. They were powerless in preventing Chielo from taking, in the dead of the night, their daughter Ezinma away from their home to present her to the Oracle.

In the event that follows, Chielo swoops away Ezinma from her parent's home for a visit to the shrine of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves while Okonkwo follows. Achebe presents a scene that confounds the contemporary mind, which belief that the priestly ministry is solely a male function and that women should always follow. Okonkwo, the most powerful man in Umofia of his day, follows Chielo, the female who performs the priestly ministry. The paradox of male dominance is being overturned precisely in this symbolic ritual function. Indeed, even in the darkness of the night, Okonkwo was careful to conceal his presence from the female, the priestess. A piercing female lone voice traversing the villages in the

¹² Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 127.

¹³ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 127.

¹⁴ Jace Weaver, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics: Native Americans and the Post-Colonial," *Semeia* 75 (1996): 172.

¹⁵ William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 156.

dead of night, and a man following stealthily from a distance is wrapped in significance. Chielo's encounter with Okonkwo stands in sharp contrast to Okonkwo's relationship to his wives. He ruled his womenfolk with iron hand. But how could the female Chielo possess such influence over Umuofia's Okonkwo? A response to the inquiry may reside in the religious milieu in Umuofia. According to the narrative, the religious environment provided a liberative space for women as well as men to flourish.

Chielo flourished integrally. Widowhood, a position associated with a woman's subjugation and marginalization, played almost no role in her engagement with life. Her spiritual practices enable her to navigate effectively the cultural terrain that expected her, *nwanyi ishi mkpe* or a widow, to be at the bottom of the social ladder. The character of Chielo subverts the accepted imagination of widowhood and womanhood at that.

This priestess was also economically viable. An accomplished trader, she was very friendly with Ekwefi with whom she shared a common stall in the village market. Not every woman can own a stall in the market. To own a stall indicates a certain level of seriousness and viability in trade. *This priestess and a mother of two*, was gainfully self-employed. *She worked like any other villager for a living. Friendly and sociable, she reaches beyond herself to Ekwefi and her daughter Ezinma.* Achebe notes that Chielo not only calls Ezinma "my daughter," but sends presents to the girl: beancakes. Significantly, this eminent Umuofia woman is profoundly ordinary. Achebe states, "Anyone seeing Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe she was the same person who prophesied when the spirit of Agbala was upon her." In this simple description of Chielo's character, a woman that was both the town's prophetess and priestess, a trader and a mother of two children, Achebe captures the very essence of spirituality, *a positive experience with respect to one's relationship with God, others, self, and the world.*

As priestess, Chielo is not only a servant, she is also a leader. Her priestly ministry had all the socially relevant norms of spiritual power and relevance. She prophetically warns Okonkwo, the most

powerful man in the land of Umuofia, to “beware” of his attitude towards the deity. Okonkwo’s disregard for the deity would eventually ruin him.

The transformation that spiritual practices evoke stands out in the bare dissimilarity between the characters of Chielo and Okonkwo. The author contrasts the two in terms of gender, social ranking and status. The astute reader is prepared for the reversal that is about to be accomplished through the mediation of the holy, the Oracle of the Caves and Hills. Achebe builds the distinction by contrasting Okonkwo, with the vulnerability of a widow, Chielo. While the man represented the dominant version of full personhood, one who could participate fully in social processes, the widow became a participant in a greater process; she of all the inhabitants of Umuofia could traverse the land in the dead of the night without fear or favour. But most importantly, she alone can enter the most sacred shrine of the town’s deity, the Oracle of the Caves and Hills. In this way, Chielo surpasses Okonkwo on all fronts; a sign of the aspect of spiritual practices. In the next section, I limit my discussion to an understanding of spirituality and spiritual practices in Igbo religious and Christian traditions aiming to find common ground that can further the cause of women’s positive engagement in social processes.

Retrieval Spirituality Practices in Igbo Religious and Christian Traditions

The Igbo tradition offers a variety of spiritual practices that offer women opportunities for full participation in the sacred. In *Things Fall Apart*, the author showed the liberative potential of participation in the sacred. Although I think it better to avoid a lengthy analysis on Igbo religious traditions and turn to discussing the thesis stated above, I would, however, state that traditional Igbo religious expressions make abundantly clear women’s participation in the sacred. Indeed feminization of the earth in the notion of the Earth goddess, *Ala*, grounds my argument. The *Ala* is represented

as a female. *Ala* embodies the community's core values: peace, love, and justice and as such her impact on the way life is lived and celebrated is enormous. Amadiume is compelling when she argues that the Earth goddess is the most important deity, the guardian of morality and the controller of the economy.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Igbo propose a binary principle, *ihe di abuo abuo* or "things exist in pairs."¹⁷ *Ihe di abuo abuo* means that the cult of *Ala* does not stand on its own. *Ala* is complemented by another deity, *Igwe* or *Elu*, the Sky. While *Ala* represents the female principles, *Igwe* represents the male.

There is a way in which the role of the female deity, a concept that is non-existent in Christianity, enhanced women's status in traditional Igbo life. The women in Igbo world are not alone among those who experience the liberating effect of traditional religion. The Nigerian scholar, Joseph Omoyajowo, contends that West African women in general exerted influence in religious, political, economic, and domestic spheres of life.¹⁸

Women's participation in the sacred practice is ritualized in many forms. I employ an example of spiritual practice at the grassroots to make my point. In African-Igbo family life, the male is the undisputable head of the household. However, there can be no household without a hearth. The hearth or *mgbala/usoekwu* is not merely a fireplace; it is the soul of the household. The hearth is a woman's domain.¹⁹ That is to say, men control the public sphere; women control the private sphere, an arrangement that reinforces the binary principle: "things exist in pairs."

¹⁶ Ifi Amadiume, "Igbo and Africa Religious Perspectives on Religious Conscience and the Global Economy," in *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*, eds Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 20.

¹⁷ Amadiume, "Igbo and Africa," 19.

¹⁸ Joseph Akinyele Omoyajowo, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion," in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 77-78.

¹⁹ Chinweizu, *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy* (Lagos, Nigeria: Pero Press, 1990), 111-112.

Physically, the *mgbala* includes a woman's living room, bedrooms, kitchen space and a backyard. The kitchen space includes the circumscribed fireplace, the *ekwu* or *agbata-ekwu*. The *agbata-ekwu* constitutes another reality, which I discussed in another work.²⁰ Within this space the female passion, compassion, and imagination coalesce in the very art of birthing, sustaining, and preserving the community life energy. In other words, in the *mgbala*, life and hope are nurtured and celebrated; dignity protected and secured. This sacred space represents the primary institution for transmitting traditional morals. The head of the *mgbala* holds political, economic, and moral sway over every member of the hearth-hold. The Nigerian scholar, Chinwiezu, insists that the matriarch authority in the nest (*mgbala*) is exercised not only over the children but over the husband as well for by this power, the woman distributes the resources, commodities and opportunities for her domain.²¹ Religious life, an indispensable element of Igbo life, emerges from the *mgbala*. In effect, within this space, the child learns essential human abilities to engage the world. Perhaps, the Igbo nomenclature *Nneka*, meaning, mother is supreme, derives from the interactions between mother and child in the *mgbala*. Achebe reflects on the significance of the name *Nneka* in an episode in *Things Fall Apart*.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, who inadvertently commits manslaughter, must go on exile from the land of Umuofia, for seven years in order to appease *Ala*, the Earth goddess, for innocent shedding blood. Naturally, when Okonkwo fled to his maternal home, Mbanta, his maternal uncle, Uchendu, received him and his family with great generosity. But this aspiring lord of Umuofia took his banishment from his fatherland acrimoniously. In a dialog steeped in paradox, Achebe introduced the centrality of the female character in Igbo life.

²⁰ Caroline Mbonu, *A Redemptive Reading of the Doule in Luke 1:26-38: Towards a Liberative Process for Women in Igbo Society* (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, 2009), 252-253.

²¹ Chinwiezu, *Anatomy of Female Power*, 109.

On the second day of Okonkwo's exile, Uchendu assembles his sons and daughters to receive his nephew Okonkwo. Uchendu addressed Okonkwo thus: Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why it is that one of the commonest names we give our children is Nneka, or "Mother is Supreme?" Uchendu proposes a response to his question because neither Okonkwo nor his cousins could offer any. "Although a child belongs to the fatherland when things are good and life is sweet," Uchendu stated, "but when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland." I posit that Achebe's introduction of the role of motherland, in a sense, the hearth, at this point of the narrative sharply contrasts and demystifies the aura of maleness or masculinity that Okonkwo spent his entire life building and protecting in his fatherland.²²

Furthermore, the centrality of the hearth in family life resonates with William Ross Wallace's poem (1865) entitled "What Rules the World: The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World." In essence Wallace highlights the hearth as the source of a child's socialized ethics and spirituality that shapes a child's imagination about how to understand herself or himself as well as how to experience life and death, success and failure, love and betrayal. Wallace leaves to the imagination to establish the *de facto* head of the "household."

Inaugurated by virtue of traditional marriage, the *mgbala* among the Ete, for example, constitutes a ritual space. A young woman, at marriage, moves to her marital home with symbols of her family/ancestral deities, the *Chi*. This practice is in contradistinction to the Greco-Roman world from which Christianity received its cultural definition. The Greco-Roman culture denies competence to the woman to worship her clan deities in her marital home.²³ Although Greek myths such as the case

²² Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 129-135.

²³ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, trans by Yaa-Lengi Meema Ngemi, eds Harold J. Salemson and Marjolijn de Jager ((New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), 112.

Medea and Jason,²⁴ suggests otherwise, the practical reality is that married women worship the gods of their husbands.

The particularity of African cultures based on matriarchy enables women to carry their clan deities to their places of marriage. I attest to this practice having witnessed the enshrined icons of the *Chi* in my grandmother's *mgbala*. The altar of *Chi* also symbolizes a continued spiritual communion with the women's natal home, a particular connection with her maternal line. My grandmother, Nwaonu Nwanguma (Nwanguma is a family name), in speaking of the *Chi*, would always refer to *Chi nnem*, meaning the *Chi* of my foremothers. I draw support from the writings of the Senegalese historian, anthropologist, physicist, and politician, Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop, who studied the human race for a long time, clearly stated that in a society that is matriarchal, the wife kept her totem, meaning her domestic god, therefore, retained her natural family name, her legal identity, after marriage.²⁵ The practice of taking into marriage symbols of one's natal divinities is not peculiar to the Igbo. Such was the practice in ancient Israel, among the Canaanites, and their neighbours. Solomon's wives, for example, brought their tribal gods to Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 11).

The mother, head of the *mgbala*, represents its cultic priest in her ritual space. Together with her hearth-hold, she offers prayers and sacrifices to Chukwu and to the ancestors, before the altar of the *Chi*. My grandmother would personally offer a chicken, for example, to celebrate a birth, or a holy day. In Christian idiom, the mother is the priest of this "house church." This spiritual practice, which the traditional religious setting made possible, was indeed transforming. It represents adult spirituality, a term to which I shall return. Women's spiritual practices in the hearth represent one example of women's participation in the sacred in Igbo religious traditions.

²⁴ Medea from Wikipidea, the free encyclopedia.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medea>. Internet accessed, December 1, 2009.

²⁵ Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, 112.

But the contemporary religious and spiritual milieu represents a different scenario. There now seems to exist a disconnect between women's spiritual practices in contemporary Africa and their participation in the tradition. Some real issues that contributed to the present situation include Westernization and foreign religions. Of these, Christianity and Islam tend to further the agenda of their missionaries, particularly their condescending attitude to women. The most delimiting factor is the conceptualization of the Supreme Deity in masculine gender. Because the Deity in the contemporary dominant religious traditions is conceived to be male, they insist that their priests must be male. Amadiume notes that the earliest record of women's protest in Igboland in 1925 against foreign religion, notably Christianity. By Christianity introducing a male deity, religious beliefs and practices no longer focused on the female deity but on a male God, his son, his [male] bishops and [male] priests.²⁶ Evidently, the new religion did not take into account the fundamental binary principle of *ihe di abuo abuo* or "things exist in pairs." The character of Chielo the priestess of Umuofia land reinterprets this profound principle that calls for equal worth that is related to balancing contrasting or opposing forces. Such balancing resonates with the foundational principles of Christian spiritual practices—a liberating vehicle. An example of the Christian spiritual practice from the Carmelite tradition will elucidate the point I make that spirituality can become a liberative vehicle that promotes women's agency. Agency employed here represents the ability to act. To have agency means having a moral imperative because one has will.

Christian spirituality encompasses the intellectual, experiential, and affective dimensions of life. In the context of women's promotion, spirituality touches on women's positive experience in relationship with God, others, the self, and the world. Scholars distinguish between two kinds of spirituality that relate to

²⁶ Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1987), 120.

women, namely, women's spirituality and womanist/feminist spirituality.

Women's spirituality is both related to and distinct from Feminist or Womanist spirituality. A spirituality that is often characterized as women's spirituality typically includes those kinds of spiritual practices such as prayer by rote and popular religiosity. Evidently, this kind of spirituality does not appear to engage deeply with life. This form of engagement tends to experience spirituality as a *quid pro quo* relationship with God. American John Shea terms this way of relating to God "adolescing spirituality."²⁷ A more mature form of spirituality, on the other hand, can be categorized in today's language as feminist or womanist. This form of spirituality tends to represent what Shea termed "adult" or "integral spirituality."²⁸ The present concern is the retrieving of strands from both Igbo traditions as well as Western spirituality that can be harnessed in articulating a spirituality that can have the potential to promote the humanity of persons, women and men alike.

Womanist/Feminist Spirituality

Feminist or womanist spirituality attends to women's experience and engages the imagination. This form of prayer also raises critical awareness of what prevents women from full humanity. Womanist or adult spirituality primarily engages such processes as meditation and contemplation that engender transformation and lead to action. I employ the term womanist as opposed to feminist to represent a theological current that takes into account the unique experience of women of African descent. Since the contemporary African women's spirituality is shaped not only by traditional imagery of religion and culture but also by the incorporation of Western norms in the teaching of the Church, I utilize an example

²⁷ John J. Shea, *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 59-60.

²⁸ Shea, *Finding God Again*, 95-102.

from the classics of Western spirituality, particularly the example of St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1584), in order to shed more light on adult or integral spirituality.

Saint Teresa of Avila, a Sixteenth century Spanish Carmelite nun, provides a good example of one who practiced adult spirituality. Notably, she practiced his form of spirituality in her cloister (her *mgbala*), of discalced Carmelites. The core of Teresa's spirituality was the "quiet" experience of God through recollection and mental prayer.²⁹ Teresa's "quiet" experience of God can also be traced to her interest in the legendary prophet of Carmel, Elijah (I Kings 19: 12-13). Her attachment to the prophet was succinctly captured in the motto of her reformed order: "*Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino Deo exercituum*" – I am motivated by the zeal of the Lord God of Host (1Kings 19:10).

Mental prayer constituted a form of contemplation which women of those days were not allowed to practice, but which Teresa insisted upon. Mental prayer was thought to expand the mind creating opportunity for independent thinking. Allowing women to engage in prayer of contemplation was considered a threat to the dominant group because of the possibility of its liberative effect that can challenge the status quo. Opposition to Teresa's form of prayer came from both ecclesiastical and the civil society. As Rowan Williams states:

Not surprisingly, these nobles and principal citizens of Avila were among the most vocal and angry opponents of the project. These were, after all, the ones with the most to lose if the system they had always relied on for spiritual security and for prestige and dominance in the aristocratic circles of Avila were now to be challenged by Teresa and her collaborators.³⁰

²⁹ Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 26. See, also *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila. Volume Two*, trans by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington D. C.: ICS Publications, 1980), 499.

³⁰ Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 50- 51.

Europe at this time was caught up in ecclesiastical crises. The authorities stressed outward compliance with ecclesiastical ceremonies and rite.

Evidently, allowing women to engage in prayer that expanded the mind was considered as a threat to the establishment that kept women “in their place.” Another reason for the prohibition of adult spirituality for women may be connected to women’s acquisition of enlightenment which comes through reasoning. The dominant culture confines women to a position of dependency and independent thinking, was considered “crossing the boundary.”

By introducing mental prayer in her monastery, Teresa undermined the traditional system that allowed women only the recitation of vocal prayer. In the practice of certain aspect of vocal prayer, more often, the intellect is not so much engaged as in mental prayer, so the level of personal awareness can become minimal. On the other hand, mental prayer tends to create avenues through which practitioners could have direct relationship with God without intermediary. The transformative effect of mental prayer can make practitioners, women as well as men, become more aware of their deepest humanity and as such relate directly to God and to the realities of the world in which they live. An example from the history of Christian spirituality supports my assertion. Thus, the American Teresan scholar, Mary Luti, asserts:

Teresa’s movement gave many women a way to participate in the century’s turbulent search for right relationship with God, to experience in a new way the mystery of transforming grace, to become, in short, important interlocutors in discussion of the fundamental questions of the age.³¹

Through introducing mental prayer, Teresa grounded her nuns in a spirituality that allowed them to develop their intellect and their

³¹ Mary Luti, *Teresa of Avila’s Way* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 53.

mental ability to challenge inhibiting structures and also to build up a passion for active engagement with contemporary issues.

Convinced that God acts within human customs and traditions, Teresa could insist on her new form of prayer for women in her order.³² She recognized that "divinity does not fit easily into a box," and so confronted the problematic situation of contemplative prayer. Thus, development and cultivation of prayer turned out to be Teresa's greatest asset in a society and in a Church where women's voices were to remain silent. Teresa's example shows that a true spiritual belief does not devalue women. Rather such principle represents order, restraint, reciprocity, mutuality, care for and non-exploitation of the weak and vulnerable. These values are not compatible with exploitation. They are radically subversive.³³ In recognition of her contribution to the Church and her tradition of prayer, Pope Paul VI in 1970, declared Saint Teresa of Avila, a Doctor of the Church. She is one of the three women Doctors of the Church.

The life and work of St. Teresa supports the theory that an adult or integral spirituality can truly be liberative for women. In a way, Achebe's characterization of Chielo, the priestess of Agbala in *Things Fall Apart* suggests similar reading of spirituality in Igbo religious traditions.

Several hermeneutical approaches would be relevant in constructing a spirituality that can be liberative for the contemporary African women. Most importantly, a hermeneutics of appreciation for the religious past of our forebears and a hermeneutics of retrieval of positive strands from the traditional past can enable to us create a new narrative. The new narrative would consist in reweaving the religious traditions, African and Christian, to respond to the contemporary question of women's advancement. I contend that this undertaking represents the single

³² Nayap-Pot, "Life in the Midst of Death," in *The Bible and Postcolonialism*, R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 62-63.

³³ Paul Avis, *Eros and the Sacred* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1989), 97.

greatest challenge facing women in contemporary Africa in their quest to develop a spirituality that can be liberative.

Conclusion

A retrieval of traditional religious experience provides critical strands that women in Africa can weave with certain elements of Western religious experience to produce a spirituality that resonates with a contemporary spiritual quest. Most especially, the liberative potential of spirituality discredits the idea of powerlessness that is typically ascribed to widowhood and womanhood. For Chielo, spiritual practice was empowering and liberative as well. The transformation that spirituality engendered both in the life of St. Teresa of Avila, and in women in traditional Igbo life can enable contemporary women's transformative role in the society. These lines culled from an interview in the Newspaper, *The Village Voice*, marking the fiftieth anniversary of *Things Fall Apart*, captures the potential of spirituality in the novel. Achebe states,

What I was doing was pointing out how unjust the Igbo society is to women. And how better to explore it than to make the hero of this story, Okonkwo...all his problems are problems to do with the feminine. There's nothing else wrong with Okonkwo except his failure to understand that the gentleness, the compassion that we associate with women is even more important than strength... Okonkwo was not able to learn... that women, compassion, music...these things are as valuable—more valuable—than war and violence.³⁴

In *Things Fall Apart*, therefore, the author paints a picture of a warrior who fails because he misses out on the fundamental

³⁴ Culled from, "Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* turns 50 this year. An interview with Chinua Achebe for the *Village Voice*," by Carol Cooper, *The Village Voice*, 19 February 2008).

principle of the land represented by *Ala*, the Earth goddess: a positive relationship between humans and the gods, i.e., spirituality.

The Prophetic Imperatives of Dialogue: The Challenges of Missions in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Effective from 1977 northern Nigeria has, for the most part, perennially experienced some form of violent religious conflict between Muslims and Muslims or between Muslims and Christians, most of which have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and billions of dollars worth of properties. This paper will briefly trace the history of northern Nigeria from the pre-colonial times, with the aim of giving insight into the root of the violent religious conflicts. It will also focus on exploring the mission and prophetic elements of dialogue from both Christian and Islamic theological resources. It will then proceed to propose effective implementation of the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action as the two forms of dialogue that have the propensity of mitigating the ongoing religious conflicts between Muslims and Muslims as well as between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria.

Introduction

The ongoing religious crises in northern Nigerian have benefitted neither the Christian nor the Islamic image in that country, not to mention its portrayal of both Christian and Islamic missions in bad taste, in the eyes of an objective and critical observer. This is because, despite the rhetoric of peace and love, each of the religions emphasize, the violent conflicts between and sometimes among followers of these religions dwarf all claims to virtue and values of peace. This article will focus on the prophetic and mission values of dialogue in the creedal activities of both Muslims

and Christians in northern Nigeria. Further, it will propose effective implementation of the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action as the two forms of dialogue that have the propensity of mitigating the ongoing religious conflicts between Muslims and Muslims as well as between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria.

Brief History of Northern Nigeria

In order to understand the current wave of violence in northern Nigeria it is imperative to comprehend the history of the region. The core Hausa-Fulani parts of northern Nigeria (which is the western part of the north) began to take shape during the sixth century with the establishment of the Hausa states. The eastern half of the north is dominated by the Kanuris, who established what later came to be known as the Kanem-Borno empire. These two ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri have been dominant players in the social political and historical development of what is today's Northern Nigeria. Of the constituents of the modern Northern Nigeria, the Kanuris were the first to embrace Islam. The first Kanem King to convert to Islam was King Humai,¹ in the late 11th century. Subsequently, Islam was introduced into the Borno areas and through trade activities to the Hausa cities. In addition to the trade relationships that brought Islam from Kanem-Borno empire, the Hausas also had trade relationships with Arab merchants who effectively introduced Islam into the seven Hausa states by the 14th century.² Many Hausas, especially merchants and political leaders, converted to Islam by choice, practicing the religion simultaneously with their traditional religions.

In 1754, Uthman dan Fodio was born in the western Hausa state of Gobir. Dan Fodio was of Fulani descent, an ethnic nationality of nomadic herders and merchants that had migrated into the Hausa land from the plains of Futa Toro, in present day

¹ See Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton. *A History of Nigeria*. New York; Cambridge University Press, 2008; p. 29.

² See Ibid.

Senegal. They intermarried with the Hausa people. Dan Fodio grew to be a respected Islamic scholar and Imam. He saw himself as a religious reformer but many of his followers regarded him as a Mahdi, the Islamic equivalent of a messiah. He preached and wrote extensively regarding his belief that the Islamic faith in Hausaland required purification. Uthman dan Fodio was disturbed by the widespread syncretism and paganism afflicting Islam in Hausaland. He travelled extensively, preaching a reform of Islam and gained many supporters. He declared a jihad that toppled the political leadership of cities, stretching from Gobir to present day Cameroon (except for cities of Kanem-Borno empire) and from Agades in present day Niger Republic to Ilorin (south-western Nigeria), setting up a strict Sunni Islamic leadership.³ The case of dan Fodio's successful jihad is an exception to the rule of how Islam generally spread in many African societies. According to Lamin Sanneh, "in most places ... Muslims embraced local versions of pluralism and tolerance rather than committing themselves and others to inflexible compliance with the religious code."⁴ It is therefore historically logical to consider the success of dan Fodio's jihad as symptomatic of the religious intolerance and bigotry, which are at the heart of both Muslim-Muslim and Muslim-Christian conflicts in northern Nigeria until date.

After successfully sweeping the Hausa states and other cities covering most of today's northern Nigeria and parts of northwestern Cameroon with his jihad and after establishing his brand of pristine Islamic social structures, dan Fodio installed mostly his Fulani kinsmen into the new power positions, thus, completely eliminating all the Hausa and minority ethnic leaders from leadership positions. This social political development with

³ See R. A. Adeleye. *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies*. New York, NY: Humanities Press Inc., 1971, pp. 31-33. Also see Murray Last. *The Sokoto Caliphate*. New York, NY: Humanities Press, Inc., 1967, pp. 63f.

⁴ See Lamin Sanneh. *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 2.

its attendant injustice is still at the heart of the political struggles and debates in many parts of northern Nigeria today. The Fulani reigned, in one form or another, until they were defeated by the British in 1903. Britain continued to use their leadership structure in the indirect rule system of the colonial administration.

The British colonial administration merged what used to be the Sokoto caliphate and the Borno Empire (in the north eastern part) into what it called the Northern Protectorate, eventually leading to an amalgamation of the Northern Protectorate with the Southern Protectorate in 1914. That was a political arrangement that gave birth to a country, which the colonial administration, led by Lord Lugard, chose to call Nigeria (a name coined by his wife from River Niger, a river which stretches from north to south of territories covered by the new country). The amalgamation, as the union of the north and south was called, held up until the country secured independence from colonial authorities on October 1 1960. After the national independence and establishment of a civil democratic society (which experienced several hiccups with military takeovers and civil war), some of the simmering social political and economic issues regarding the relationship of the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy and the previously dominated ethnic nationalities exacerbated into social and political upheavals and violent conflicts. Since the northern minorities did not have adequate political and economic clout to challenge the dominant Hausa-Fulani leadership, religion became the easiest instrument to address the social, political, and economic grudges. This is so because the ethnic minorities are predominantly Christian, while the Hausa-Fulani people are predominantly Muslim. Even among the Hausa-Fulani there is a significant portion of the population which considers itself the butt of the elitist Hausa-Fulani social structure. This group although Muslim by faith has axe to grind with the feudal structure of the Hausa-Fulani society and its oligarchy. A considerable percentage of this group of Muslims are the products of the *Almajiri* institution. The *almajiris* are young boys who from preteen age (sometimes as young as five or six) are

handed over by their parents to local Islamic teachers for Islamic education and training. Many of them remain with their teachers until their adult age. Their Islamic teachers usually house them and they are sent out daily by these teachers to solicit alms from the public. Therefore, they depend on the charity of the public for their daily sustenance. Many of these people over the years have found succor in Islamic sects like the Izala, Yan Tastine (the Maitatsine group), and recently Boko Haram. The *Alamajiri* institution has consistently bred a vast population of unemployed youth who have come quite handy for these sects in their need for army of loyalists who are willing to do the bidding of their masters, the sect leaders.⁵

Therefore, the history of northern Nigeria since 1977 has been one of repeated violent conflicts among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians.⁶ In each of these conflicts, many lives are lost and properties worth millions of dollars are destroyed. These conflicts affect not only Northern Nigeria, but have also had the tendency of spreading to other parts of the country. During these violent conflicts, social life and commerce are seriously interrupted. The trickle down effects of these conflicts have global implications. Often the Muslim-Christian conflicts in the north have ended up with reprisal attacks of people of northern extraction working and living in different parts of southern Nigeria.⁷ In many

⁵ See George Onmonya. "Why Religious Crises Persist in Northern Nigeria." *Nigerian Village Square*, April 3rd, 2009. <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/george-onmonya/why-religious-crises-persist-in-northern-nigeria.html>. Accessed 7/29/10. Also see Niyi Awofeso, Jan Ritchie, and Pieter Degeling. "The Almajiri Heritage and the Threat of Non-State Terrorism in Northern Nigeria--Lessons from Central Asia and Pakistan." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 26, Issue 4 July 2003, pp. 311-332.

⁶ See John N. Paden. *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria*. Harrisonburg, Virginia: R. R. Donnelley, 2005, pp. 30-31.

⁷ Cf. John N. Paden. *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria*. Harrisonburg, Virginia: R. R. Donnelley, 2005, p. 23.

instances, crude oil supplies in the affected southern parts of Nigeria are disrupted and consequently the international crude oil business is impacted as well as the stock exchange market, as Nigeria is a leading member of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and crude oil is a significant item in the international stock trade. And as John Paden rightly says, “anything that looks like an Islamic uprising is certain to alarm the international press.”⁸

Religion, in general, continues to suffer negative publicity and the conflict is fed by the agenda of people who have tended to negate the values of religion in society or exclusively used religion to address social, political, economic, and cultural problems. As long as these people are able to perpetuate the notion that the conflict is primarily the result of religious discord, the region will continue to suffer.

The continued conflict in Northern Nigeria between Muslims and Christians does more damage to the frayed global relationship between people of the two religions and perpetuates the *raison d’etre* for continued strife and distancing between Muslims and Christians in the world. There is therefore a need to evolve means for healthy collaborative co-existence between all the peoples of Northern Nigeria regardless of their religious, ethnic, ideological, and cultural differences. Interreligious dialogue certainly offers the much needed framework for making such healthy collaboration among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians a reality.

Dialogue as Mission from Islamic and Christian Theological Perspectives

To adequately address this sub-topic, I will reference Islamic and Christian sources. The ultimate goal here is to articulate the imperative mission of dialogue from both Christian and Islamic

⁸ See *ibid.*

perspectives. There is going to be a preponderance of Christian insights because my thoughts and worldview are significantly shaped by my Catholic faith tradition. However, to articulate my points, objectively and constructively, I will refrain from delving into controversial hermeneutical analysis.

With a limited understanding of mission, associating it with dialogue sounds preposterous. The limited and anachronistic perception of mission presupposes conversion to the faith of an evangelizer or the extension of the territorial dominance and estate of a particular faith tradition. Charles Jones is right to ascribe such limited understanding of mission to the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹ Mission in that era radiated negative understandings, given its complicity in the social evil of colonialism. Mission today has a more humane, humble, extensive and deeper application and meaning. The document of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians considers mission as “a single but complex and articulated reality,”¹⁰ hence indicating a more extended understanding of the term.

Mission from a Christian perspective must necessarily reflect the mission of Christ, epitomized in his sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7), which encapsulates the right approach to the Kingdom of God announced by Christ. Jesus unequivocally identified his mission as primarily that of bringing the good news of God’s Kingdom to the world. He identified himself as one who brings good news to the poor, offering liberation to prisoners and captives, opening the eyes of the blind, giving relief to the downtrodden, and announcing the nearness of God’s Kingdom. It is

⁹ See Jones, Charles B. *The View From Mars Hill: Christianity in the Landscape of World Religions*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 2005, p. 167.

¹⁰ See Secretariat For Non-Christians, “The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions : Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission,” May 10, 1984, #13. <http://www.msceurope.co.uk/Dialogic%20and%20Mission%20-%20PCID.pdf>. Accessed 6/3/2010.

a mission that was both existential and vocational for Christ (Lk. 4:18-19). He embodied and lived the mission. For Christians, who received “power when the Holy Spirit” came upon them, Jesus’ mission has a global outreach. They were Jesus’ “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts. 1:8). Consequently, Christians are reminded, that by their choice to be followers of Christ, they are required to embody Christ’s universal mission.

Islam as proclaimed by the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) is the continuation of the religion of Abraham: worship of the One God who created all that exists and to whom all creatures should be drawn. Therefore, from the purview of this vision of mission, Muslims are reminded that they have the honorable responsibility of continuing the original mission of Judaism and Christianity as worshippers of the One God, revealed to all the prophets of God from Adam, Noah, Moses, through Christ. Accordingly, the Qur’an affirms itself as the continuum of earlier scriptures by saying: “He [Allah] hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel” (Q. 3:3).¹¹ Albeit, Islam considers Mohammed as the seal of all God’s prophet, and Islam, the most authentic adherence to the right religion (Q. 5: 14-15). The Qur’an serves as a reminder of the essence of that mission, which Christ embodied in these words:

O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah ... Allah has promised those who believe and do good works: Theirs will be forgiveness and immense reward. And they who

¹¹ All Quranic quotations are from the text of Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc.

disbelieve and deny Our revelations, such are rightful owners of hell (Q. 5:8-10).¹²

Islamic *Da'awah* (mission) is about the spread of the message of the One God whom everyone should worship and to which the prophetic life of Mohammed is geared; calling people to the consciousness of what this belief entails. The five pillars of the Islamic faith (*shahadah*, *salat*, *zakat*, *sawim*, and *hajj*) represent doing God's will on earth, which prepare every believer to be worthy enough to merit eternal life in paradise, a synonym for the ultimate kingdom of God. Muslims are invited to spread Islam, especially by their practical examples, hence the emphasis on public demonstration of their beliefs through prayer, alms giving, fasting, and search for peace. In the words of Mahmoud Ayoub:

The idea that the best way to obey God is through care for our fellow human beings is essential to all three monotheistic faiths. Caring for the wayfarer in Islam, for example, can be translated in modern times into caring for those who have no home, who are always on the move, either as refugees or as homeless in our big cities, helping those who are in dire poverty, or who are sick. Obeying God means to clothe the naked, to care for the children, to do social work, in short, to work together toward achieving a just society.

On this we can all agree. This is work in God's cause, to which the Qur'an is calling Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and all human beings. It is a call to worship God alone and to realize that part of the worship of God is to do good to his His creatures.¹³

¹² For further references to the reward of believers and punishment for unbelief see Q. 7:40ff.

¹³ See Omar, Irfan A. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007, p. 15.

Therefore, all Muslims are called to embody the spirit of the *Da'awah* by living out those social and public expressions of their faith.

Both Muslims and Christians therefore, will concede that at the heart of their mission, as revealed to them either through Jesus or the Qur'an, is the task to prepare all people for God's Kingdom. The means of achieving this kingdom from the perspectives of the two religions are both parallel and divergent in different aspects¹⁴. More importantly, both religions insist on active demonstration of their beliefs through empirical living examples. Early Christianity even had a common saying, *laborare est orare* (to work is to pray), which is indicative of the preference for empirical exemplary lives over clinging excessively to doctrines and theological statements.

It is important to state that with the advent of dialogue as a substantive means of effective communication among religions, the concept of mission has taken added meaning. As Jones rightly observed, "the way in which Christians go about missions has evolved along with the development of dialogue through the twentieth century"¹⁵. Jones further highlights what is historically and methodologically true about the spread of Christianity, namely proclamation and witnessing as the fundamental mode. Therefore, since mission is often identified as evangelizing or proclaiming and witnessing, dialogue has fittingly become a significant aspect of mission. This is because dialogue is essentially an exercise of sharing the truth of one's beliefs and values with the religious other. In support of the understanding of dialogue as witnessing, Lamin Sanneh said that "the view we have of God is not unconnected to the path by which we ascend to that view, so that dialogue must be about the path as well as about witness to the truth the path leads to. Dialogue and witness, therefore, belong together"¹⁶.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.15-16

¹⁵ Jones, *The View From Mars Hill: Christianity in the Landscape of World Religions*, p. 177.

¹⁶ Sanneh, *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa* P.6.

Both the document of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians (*Dialogue and Mission*, May 1984) and that of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, DP of 1991) consider dialogue as integral to the Church's understanding of mission. DP specifically state: "Proclamation and dialogue are thus both viewed, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church."¹⁷ Therefore, in no uncertain terms the Catholic Church considers dialogue as an indispensable element of mission.

Muslims on their part have been reminded, from the inception of the religion, of the necessity for ongoing dialogue with peoples of the Book. Ayoub testifies to this fact: "for almost fourteen hundred years the Qur'an has been calling Muslims, Jews, and Christians to what we have still in vain been trying to achieve for the last half century or so, namely, interreligious ecumenism based on a sincere dialogue of faith"¹⁸.

Having drawn attention to the mission value of dialogue and how dialogue is indispensable for the realization of mission in today's society, I now focus on how the prophetic aspects of dialogue will further enhance the objectives of mission in northern Nigeria.

The Prophetic Imperative of Dialogue in Northern Nigeria

The 1984 document of the Vatican Secretariat For Non-Christians (later known as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious dialogue)

¹⁷ See Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation*. 1991, #2.
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html. (Accessed 6/3/2010).

¹⁸ See Omar, A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub, p. 4.

Dialogue and Mission,¹⁹ identified four forms of interreligious dialogue. They are listed as dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience. DP echoes these four forms of dialogue.²⁰ According to DP, dialogue of life refers to “where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrow, their human problems and preoccupations.”²¹ DP defines dialogue of action as situations “in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.”²² Further, DP qualifies dialogue of theological exchange as conditions, “where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of the respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values.”²³ Regarding the dialogue of religious experience, DP sees it as occasions, “where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.”²⁴ Since 1984 when the document *Dialogue and Mission* identified these four forms of dialogue, they have become generally accepted and in some instances added to but never rejected.

Therefore, it may be understandable to conclude that the popular broad division of dialogue into four forms goes to elaborate the extensive relevance and application of dialogue to faith and social matters. Every religion is intent on impacting both the spiritual and social dimensions of human life. Understandably, the

¹⁹ See Secretariat for Non-Christians, “The Church and other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission.” *The Pope Speaks: The Church Documents Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1: 253.

²⁰ These four forms dialogue are extensively considered in the document “Dialogue and Proclamation” (DP). See the English version of DP in William Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 93-118.

²¹ See *ibid.*, p. 104.

²² See *ibid.*

²³ See *ibid.*

²⁴ See *ibid.*

four forms of dialogue influence both the social and spiritual dimensions of interreligious relationships. This author is of the opinion that given the perennial violent social and political relationship between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria, more energy needs to be focused on the social dimensions of dialogue. The two forms of dialogue that directly affect the social relationships of all religious people are dialogue of life and dialogue of action.

Going by the definition given above, dialogue of life refers to the informal dialogic activities that people are engaged in as a matter of everyday living experiences. This is the dialogue where people interact healthily with neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers of different religions. During such interactions, the partners in dialogue get to know each other better without any pressure, intimidation, or suspicion. The values of dialogue of life include knowledge and appreciation of the cultural and religious values of one's neighbour, friend, family, co-worker and/or acquaintance.

The dialogue of action, on its part, requires a deliberately organized collaboration of peoples from different religious blocks. It may also entail community events sponsored by the collaboration of different religious groups in the society. It is through the auspices of such dialogue that Muslims and Christians can collaboratively protect, promote, and advocate for the common good in the society. Jones proposed what he called "leavening model"²⁵ as a dialogic goal with the motive of spreading the mission of the gospel. In this model, a Christian seeks to impart values cherished and treasured in her or his faith to someone of a different faith tradition. An example will be teaching the value and dignity of every person by providing quality education, vocational training (trade and other skills) to unskilled workers so they can secure jobs that will earn them living wages. Other collaborative dialogue of action examples include, building health clinics, and

²⁵ See Jones. *The View From Mars Hills*., pp. 180f.

providing legal support to victims of different kinds of abuse. These values when inculcated demonstrate some of the highest levels of achieving the mission of God's kingdom on earth entrusted to every Christian. In the same manner, significant Islamic values are passed on to the rest of society.

There is no doubt that these two forms of dialogue have empirical prophetic values and will produce desired result of social harmony and solidarity between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria or anywhere for that matter, where they are successfully implemented. Therefore, as prophetic tools, I propose that they be assiduously pursued and promoted among the peoples of northern Nigeria. Through these forms of dialogue, genuine interest and curiosity to learn about the other are established and developed. They are primarily essential to establish trust, true friendship, altruism, and understanding between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria.

Furthermore, steps must be taken to discourage public religious preaching, which is often a source of discord and discontent in communities and cities in northern Nigeria. Such public activities often involve local preachers or popular evangelists/imams setting up public address systems at street corners or public parks for open air preaching. These activities have led to several violent conflicts among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians. It was the content of the public preaching of a German evangelist, Reverend Reinhard Bonnke, which sparked off one of the worst Christian-Muslim clashes in the city of Kano in 1991. The Maitatsine religious riot in Kano 1980 with a death toll of over 1,400 people, which spread to Kaduna and Maiduguri in 1982 and other parts of the north in that decade, gathered steam from the public preaching of a sectarian Muslim cleric, Mohammadu Maruwa.²⁶

²⁶ See Anthony Akaeze, "From Maitatsine to Boko Haram," *NewsWatch*, Wednesday October 29, 2009. http://www.newswatchngr.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1459&Itemid=26. Accessed 6/7/10, p. 2.

Equally, fundamentalism among both Christians and Muslims is at the heart of the religious bigotry, which continues to fuel the hate and anger harboured by the different religious groups in northern Nigeria. It is accurate to conclude that fundamentalism is one of the greatest obstacles to the success of any forms of dialogue, including the dialogues of life and action. It is therefore imperative for both Muslim and Christian educators and leaders to discourage fanatical and fundamentalist approaches to religion. But more importantly, it is incumbent on all Nigerians to seek to be better educated about both their religion and the religions of others in the society. It is a known fact, but sad that most Christians and Muslims in all parts of Nigeria have very limited or naïve understanding of both their own religion and the religions of their neighbours. In the absence of a comprehensive and balanced understanding of religion, fanaticism and fundamentalism feed off the ignorance and gullibility of religious adherents. This is one of the explanations for the spread and persistence of religious conflicts in both northern Nigeria and other parts of the country.

Healthy intra and interreligious dialogue advanced through dialogue of action and dialogue of life will significantly help to maintain and respect the multi-religious setting of Nigeria. Religiously motivated conflicts in northern Nigeria have often been as the result of one religion or a sect claiming superiority over others or denouncing the values of others. This phenomenon goes back to the 1979 Muslim-Christian students' conflict at the College of Education in Kafanchan, Kaduna State to the series of violent conflicts either among Muslims or between Muslims and Christians. For instance, the Yan Izala, based in Zaria and Kaduna, instigated a number of conflicts in the 1980s against fellow Muslims in protest against what they called the rise of innovation (*bid'a*) among Muslims or in opposition to the Sufi brotherhood movement.²⁷

²⁷ The facts of incessant intra and interreligious conflicts have defined life in northern Nigeria especially since 1979. More facts and information of these conflicts can be found in much more details in the works of Anthony Akacze,

Dialogue of life is a necessity for every society and it is effectively enhanced when all people in the society respect the values of dialogue as they engage in their regular life interactions. Although Muslims and Christians tenuously live and work together in many parts of northern Nigeria, issues of minimal social, political, and religious relevance like the planned hosting of Miss World beauty pageant in 2002 at Abuja was spun into huge religious and social controversy leading to one of the several vicious religious conflicts that have defined life in many northern Nigerian cities. For a healthy dialogue of life, Muslims and Christians should be encouraged as well as be free to live and work together. This is not the case in places like Zaria, Kano, Sokoto, and many other northern cities, where, from the colonial times, there have been a normative residential structure that separates Muslims from non-Muslims, hence setting up a suburb often referred to as *sabon gari* (new city)²⁸. This structure notoriously separates Muslims and Christians and denies well meaning citizens the privilege of harmoniously living together and sharing life stories and experiences together. While some of the exclusive Muslim enclaves have today welcomed non-Muslims, they are often reminded that they are only tolerated and cannot really call such places home. Hence, Christians are almost never permitted to build churches or set up structures that will highlight any form of Christian symbol in such places. Moreover, Christians who live in such places become easy targets during any Muslim-Christian conflicts. If Muslims will sincerely welcome and accommodate dialogue of life and dialogue of action, then Christians and other

"From Maitatsine to Boko Haram," *Newswatch*, Wednesday October 29, 2009. http://www.newswatchngr.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1459&Itemid=26. Accessed 6/7/10, and ITA, Nigeria Religious Sectarianism. http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/national_security/nigeria_national_security_religious_sectarianism-10048.html. Accessed 6/7/10

²⁸ The idea of Sabon Gari is a euphemism for "city of infidels." This is because, as a norm, the Sabon Garis are the places you can have bars, hotels, brothels, gambling, and churches and other Christian symbols. Therefore, literally Muslims consider Sabon Garis as the cities of sin and home of infidels.

non-Muslims should be encouraged to feel at home living in the former exclusively Muslim enclaves. Allowing the construction of churches and public display of Christian symbols will underscore the openness and commitment of the dominant Muslim societies of northern Nigeria to both the dialogues of action and life.

Therefore, dialogues of life and action provide acceptable conduits for promoting a society that reflects the desires and values of both Islam and Christianity as well as establishing a society where cherished values are promoted and supported. It is necessary to iterate that these values are not imposed on others but adapted and appreciated by the religious other. People emulate them because they are considered valuable and desirable. Through such dialogues, the religious other makes a moral and deliberate choice for those values but not coaxed or pressured in any way.

Dialogues of action and life are empirically prophetic. They are also the most subtle and friendly forms of the mission; they are socially friendly as well as friendly toward the religious other. They are certainly about the most effective means of dialogue in today's pluralist societies. Therefore, a pluralist society like Nigeria will greatly benefit in the improvement of the relationship of Muslims and Christians if the dialogues of action and life are effectively implemented.

Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue is both prophetic and existential, especially based on the Christian and Islamic articulations of the idea. This is so because dialogue of action and dialogue of life seek the fullest realization of the mission of Christ as well as fulfill significantly the recommendations of the Qur'an. If these forms of dialogue are adequately maintained and persistently promoted in societies like northern Nigeria, the rancorous relationship among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians will be significantly minimized. The prophetic nature of both forms of dialogue stem from their goal of promoting and sustaining elements of God's kingdom here

on earth by carrying out works of justice, peace, and charity.

The successful implementation of the dialogues of life and action will appropriately set the ball rolling for the exercise of the other two forms of dialogue: dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of religious experience. These two forms of dialogue are more advanced and sensitive. They are in the areas of faith traditions that present serious social problems and sources of irretraceable conflicts. Several instances of the violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria have developed from controversial and inflammatory doctrinal and theological issues. The Reinhard Bonnke riots of 1991 started as a reaction of Muslims' to the inflammatory preaching of the German evangelist. The 2001 riots in Kano started as a result of Muslims' reaction to the alleged desecration of some Quranic text. A number of riots from other parts of northern Nigeria including Zaria, Kaduna, Jos, etc are the products of inflammatory doctrinal teachings from both Muslims and Christians.²⁹ Therefore, an overt and sustained focus on the dialogue of life and dialogue of action will certainly promote better neighborliness, collaboration, and cooperation between Muslims and Christians.

Judging from the forgoing conclusion of how dialogue of action and dialogue of life help to cement better social interaction and religious understanding between Muslims and Christians, it is valid to conclude that the success of such collaboration and cooperation will have global positive political and social ramifications. Such development will prompt the required social political mindset as well as the moral will for confronting any kind of religiously motivated violence (by either Christian or Muslim fundamentalists). Maintaining the momentum acquired from such political, social, and moral will is also indispensable for addressing existing social vices, especially those created by religious bigotry and misapplication of religion.

²⁹ Cf. Paden. *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution*..., pp. 30-31.

The Significance of Augustine's Theology of the Holy Spirit for Communion Ecclesiology

By

Gabriel Mendy, C.S.Sp. PhD

Introduction:

Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium*, was specific and forthright about the Holy Spirit as the source of communion in the Church. Since this important historic event, how did post-Vatican II Church documents develop or advance the position of the Council on the Holy Spirit? From my research, I was slightly disappointed about the Magisterium's silence or ambiguity on the Spirit as the principle of the Church's communion. Chapter two of *Lumen Gentium* (article 13) clearly affirmed: "God sent the Spirit of his Son, the Lord and giver of life, who for the Church and for each and every believer is the principle of their union and unity in the teaching of the apostles and communion, in the breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2.42)."¹ The Final Report of the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985, twenty years after the close of Vatican II, did not elaborate on the Spirit as the principle of communion though it reaffirmed that "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents."² Similarly, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its 1992 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion" did not mention the Spirit in its discussion of the following topics: the universal Church and particular churches, Communion of the

¹ "Lumen Gentium 13." In *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, and Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), 18.

² Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, "The Church in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the World," (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1985), Sec. C 1.

Churches, Eucharist and Episcopate, Unity and Diversity in Ecclesial Communion, and Ecclesial Communion and Ecumenism. Reference to the Spirit in this letter was, rather, limited to the Church's invisible communion. In light of the Magisterium's ambiguity over the principle or source of the Church's communion and faced with a weakening communion between the universal Church and local churches and between the hierarchical and charismatic structures of the Church, I want to address in this essay the Spirit's function in the Church as the source of communion, guided by Augustine's theology of the Holy Spirit. Such an exercise is significant, in my view, because it has positive and far-reaching implications for all aspects of the Church's unity, life, and mission.

Augustine's thought on the Function of the Holy Spirit in the Church

Sufficient study and reflection on the subject of the Father and the Son was already undertaken by those who commented on the Scriptures before Augustine. However, no extensive and detailed discussion, as far as he was concerned, was equally accorded to the subject of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Augustine reflected on the Spirit in his theological writings in order to understand what is properly unique to the Spirit in its relationship with the Father and the Son and its function in the Body of Christ, the Church. In the immanent Trinity, the Spirit is specifically identified by Augustine as the common gift, the bond of love, and the communion between the Father and the Son. The Spirit is, therefore, distinct from the giver of the gift, namely, the Father and the Son because the Spirit is itself the personification of their self-gift to each other. These terms or designations provide us with an insight into who the Spirit is and what the Spirit does in the immanent Trinity and the Church as the principle of communion. For Augustine, it was

by what is common to them [that] both the Father and the Son wished us to have communion both with them and among ourselves; by this gift which they both possess as one they wished to gather us together and make us one, that is to say, by the Holy Spirit who is God and the gift of God. By this gift we are reconciled to the godhead, and by this gift we enjoy the godhead.³

Since the divine persons are substantially united, Augustine would likewise affirm that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work inseparably *ad extra*. While the Spirit's distinctive quality and function were specified by Augustine, he was equally Trinitarian in perspective in maintaining that each divine person works with the cooperation of all. The Spirit was not, therefore, subordinated to the Father and the Son because, as far as Augustine was concerned, the Spirit is divine, equal, and inseparably united with them.

What connects and unites the divine persons of the Trinity and the community of faith, the Church, and what enables the members to participate in the life and love of the Father and the Son is the Spirit in its capacity as the everlasting gift of the Father and the Son. Therefore, it is in the Spirit that the Father and the Son are united and it is in the Spirit that the divine persons are united with the members of Christ's Body, the Church. For this reason, Augustine would strongly argue that

the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the charity of God is poured into our hearts, and through it the whole triad dwells in us. This is the reason why it is most apposite that the Holy Spirit,

³ St. Augustine, "Sermon 71.18," In *Sermons III (51-94) on the New Testament*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 256. Augustine's perception of the universal Church as a communion with God and among us was re-echoed by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* when this Council defined the Church as 'a sacrament — a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.' 1.

while being God, should also be called the gift of God. And this gift, surely, is distinctively to be understood as being the charity which brings us through to God, without which no other gift of God at all can bring us through to God.⁴

The Spirit is specifically God's love that is poured in our hearts and it is the means through which we equally come to know, share, and experience the life and love of the Father and the Son. In essence, it is through the Spirit that the Father and the Son dwell in the Church and it is through the Spirit that we come to participate in their divine life as well. There is one Church, in that sense, in which the Spirit is the bond of love and source of communion and unity among the members.

The Spirit's indispensable role in the life and unity of the Church and the obligation of the members to preserve their communion in the Spirit was further articulated by Augustine in his analysis of the Spirit's mission. First of all, the Spirit is identified as the gift of the Father and the Son to the Church that is meant to empower the members of the Church so that they can be united in love. Secondly, Augustine would argue that the Spirit is the supreme gift of God that is common to all the members of the Church. The members are ultimately gifted and equal in the Spirit because the Spirit is not reserved to a select few based on their holiness. Furthermore, the Spirit is identified as the source of the Church's charismatic gifts, as well as the efficient cause of the sacraments of the Church. As a result, the Spirit is properly compared to what the soul does in the body because the Spirit is indispensable to the Church where it functions as the unifying and animating principle of all the members. In this Church, the different members are "all doing their own thing but living the same life together [because] what the soul is to the human body, the Holy

⁴ St. Augustine, *The Trinity* XV. 32, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 421.

Spirit is to the body of Christ.”⁵ However, the Spirit is not subjected to the Church because, for Augustine, the Spirit remains a divine person who is not conjoined to its bodily forms. Within the Church itself, Augustine would insist that there are different members who have diverse charismatic gifts, vocations, and languages.

In light of Augustine’s theology of the Spirit outlined above, I argue that the Church is a communion of unity in diversity in which all are alive in the Spirit. As a result, the charismatic and unique gifts of the faithful and of each local church should be preserved and used for the good of the whole Church. I strongly believe that the Spirit is the one who enables all members to be united in love and to speak the languages of all the nations while preserving their identity and communion in the Church.

Limited Focus of this Essay

Based on Augustine’s theology of the Spirit, I will discuss in this essay the Church’s communion in the Spirit and its implications for the life, unity, and mission of the Church. Consequently, I will address four issues of interest on the Spirit as the source of communion in the Church.

First, the Spirit and not the hierarchical structure of the Church is the principle of both the Church’s visible and invisible communion: the Spirit is identified as the source of communion between the divine persons of the Trinity and the Church, the source of communion between the universal Church and the local churches, and among the diverse members of Christ’s Body, the Church. For Augustine, the Spirit is the one through whom the whole Triad dwells in the Church and it is in the Spirit that the diverse members of Christ’s Body, the Church, are assembled and united in love.

⁵ St. Augustine, “Sermon 267.4,” In *Sermons III 7 (230-272B) on the Liturgical Seasons*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1993), 276.

Second, the communion of the Church is a unity in diversity created by the Spirit. The fact that the nature of the Church's communion in the Spirit is modeled on the unity of the divine persons means that the Church's communion is inherently a unity in diversity. As such, the unity in diversity that exists in the communion of the universal and local churches, the unity that prevails despite the diversity of cultures and of the gifts of the members of the Church is highly appreciated and reaffirmed to fully ensure that unity in the church does not result into uniformity. Consequently, there should be mutual respect and tolerance for all the different cultures and languages, and for the different gifts of the members of the Church. Such a positive orientation will encourage the full participation of all the members in the life and mission of the Church. They will in turn appreciate their diverse contributions and communion in the Spirit.

Third, the charismatic structure of the Church is a permanent and indispensable feature of the Church as a result of the Spirit's ongoing impact on the formation and renewal of the Church. Charisms are, therefore, expressions and signs of the Spirit's function in building up the Church. The danger of adopting the extremes of a Spirit-based church that is opposed to the hierarchical nature of the Church would be avoided in my reflection on the Spirit's function in the Church. In fact, the Spirit is properly considered as one who inclusively works with the Father and the Son *ad extra*.

Finally, the particularity of the African Church should highly be emphasized in its communion with the universal Church. Based on the Spirit's unifying function and the unique gifts it confers on each local church⁶, the African church should, in my view, emphasize its particularity. At the same time, it should also use its gifts and resources for the good of the whole Church in order to strengthen its communion with other local churches within the universal Church. These qualities which represent the identity

⁶ "Particular Church" and "local Church" are used interchangeably (editor).

and experience of the African church include: the sense of community life, the centrality of life and family in African culture, and the dynamic nature of Africa's ritual and liturgical celebration. Any attempt to reject or disregard the African church's particularity would be counter-productive; it would perpetuate the present state of affairs in which the African church is not highly represented in the communion of the universal Church.

In general, I believe that the Church is inherently a unity in diversity in its constitution. For this reason, all members of the Church should fully participate in the Church according to their gifts and charisms. Consequently, the Spirit who is the source of the Church's unity in diversity is specifically identified as the animating principle that gives life to the members of the Church. Those who are united in the Church by the Spirit are equally alive in the Spirit because the Spirit is the one who empowers them with its life-giving breath. They are ultimately required to be in communion with the Church as such if the Spirit and the sacraments they receive are going to have an effect on them.

The universal Church is often equated with the visible ecclesial structures that are predominantly present throughout the whole world. Considered in that light, the universal Church is erroneously perceived as a classic worldly institution that has its central administration in Rome. As a matter of fact, the universal Church is even equated by some individuals with the local church in Rome. Such a mistaken perception of the universal Church does not adequately represent the true nature of this Church. Augustine provides a very broad-based understanding of the universal Church transcending the limits of space and time. For him,

all of us together are the members of Christ and his body; not only those of us who are in this place, but throughout the whole world; and not only those of us who are alive at this time, but what shall I say? From Abel the just right up to the end of the world, as long as people beget and are begotten, any of the just who make the passage through this

life, all that now – that is, not in this place but in this life – all that are going to be born after us, all constitute the one body of Christ, while they are each individual members of Christ. So if all constitute the body and are each individual members, there is of course a head, of which this is the body.⁷

From this text, it is evident that the universal Church is not the church in Rome and its members are not only present throughout the world, but they include the saints and all the faithful departed who are spiritually in communion with the members of the Church on earth. This is precisely the Church that we profess in the creed as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The universal Church, therefore, has a divine origin or foundation and the Spirit is its source of communion. These two realities of the universal Church, namely, its divine origin and its communion in the Spirit are directly linked because they define the Church as a whole.

As a result of the Spirit's function as the source of communion, it means that the universal Church and local churches fully share a common life in a communion of mutual interiority. Each of them is, accordingly, an integral part of the other through the Spirit that unites them in a communion of love. For this reason, they are expected to support each other in a spirit of solidarity and charity as a means to strengthening their communion and becoming a sign of the Spirit at work. In the Church where the Spirit functions as the source of communion, it means that the whole Church is likewise united in truth and preserved from error. An individual or group of members or local church does not, consequently, have an exclusive knowledge in matters of faith and morals because there is, rather, a shared insight of the truth among the members of the Church. However, on account of their office or charism, some members of the Church are appointed to teach with

⁷ St. Augustine, "Sermon 341.11," In *Sermons III (341-400) on Various Subjects*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1995), 26.

authority in accordance with their vocation. In its efforts to conform itself to the Spirit's form of communion, the Church is also required on its part to renew its image and mission. This should be done in communion, not in isolation since the universal Church and local churches are united in the Spirit. The Church should also be involved in ecumenism and inculturation to further the unifying mission of the Spirit.

Contributions of Augustine's Perspective towards Communion Ecclesiology

A brief glance at some of the proposals discussed in recent years by those who believe it is necessary for the Church to transform itself in order to be effective in its mission will bring to light the various points of view that have emerged on this subject. Such attempt will not only provide the opportunity to expose the shortcomings of these proposals but also to bring to light the significance of Augustine's theology of the Spirit to the Church's understanding of its communion, identify, life, and mission.

In its teaching, the Church is always keen to present itself as the Mystical Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, or the People of God that is distinct from other forms of human associations. While this is undeniable, Cardinal Avery Dulles persuasively argued that "the prevailing image of the Catholic Church is highly institutional":

the Church is understood in terms of dogmas, laws, and hierarchical agencies which impose heavy demands of conformity ... The top officers are regarded as servants of the institution, bound by a rigid party line, and therefore inattentive to the impulses of the Holy Spirit and

unresponsive to the legitimate religious concerns of the faithful.⁸

The Church is certainly institutional in nature. However, this aspect of the Church is bound to have a negative impact on the members if it is over emphasized. In the bid to conform to the laws and patterns of the Church, the members are inclined to become passive towards new initiatives and challenges that require their response. For this reason, I believe that in addition to its institutional structure, Augustine's insight helps one to highlight the very important sacramental, charismatic, and prophetic dimensions of the Church.

Towards this end, Dulles has proposed the community of disciples' model in place of the institutional model of the Church. For him, the former is most appropriate and relevant to the present context of the members because

the idea of discipleship, as we know it from the New Testament, makes ample room for both freedom and failure. Unlike the bare notion of community, discipleship brings out the demands of membership. The Church is not a club of like-minded individuals, but a venture in which all depend on the community and are obliged to make contributions to the community and its work.⁹

One must commend Dulles for presenting an alternative model to the institutional image of the Church. Positively, the Church will be more engaged with its evangelizing and prophetic mission if its members are organized and formed into a community of disciples witnessing to their vocation and faith in Jesus. However, the problem of conformity and the failures of the members to be attentive to the Spirit, especially the office holders, do not seem to be fully addressed in Dulles' discussion of this alternative model.

⁸ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 3.

⁹ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 15.

On account of these concerns, I maintain, based on Augustine's theology of the Spirit, that the Spirit is the animating and unifying principle of the Church's life and mission. All the members of the Church are, therefore, animated and empowered by the Spirit because "they have been born of God and of the womb of mother Church by the Holy Spirit so let them be brothers, let them have an inheritance to be possessed, and not divided."¹⁰ Identifying the functions of the Spirit in the Church in this way clearly indicates that the Church is a communion in the Spirit. At the same time, it reveals the unity in diversity that exists among the members and between the universal Church and the local churches.

Within the Church, there is an element of suspicion and fear because of the tension and gap that exists between the hierarchical and charismatic members of the Church. This unfortunate situation is further complicated and perpetuated by an abuse of office and authority in the Church that ought to be at the service of all the members. As a solution to the problem, Dulles argued that

ideally the hierarchical and the charismatic, since they proceed from the same Lord and are intended for the same goal (the edification of the Church in love), should be responsive to each other ... It is often said that the last word lies with the office holders, since it is their function to discern between true and false charisms – a point made more than once in the Constitution of the Church ... In a pilgrim Church time is needed to sift the good grain from the chaff, the wheat from the cockle (Mt. 13:14-30). If a true consensus is to be achieved, it must be the work of the Spirit, who dwells not in the hierarchy alone but in all the faithful, as we are taught by Vatican II. In this sense charism has the last word.¹¹

¹⁰ St. Augustine, "Sermons 357.4" In *Sermons III/10 (341-400) on Various Subjects*, 202.

¹¹ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 37-38.

In affirming the necessity of both the hierarchical and charismatic constitutions of the Church, Dulles has recognized that one cannot be suppressed at the expense of the other. However, the idea that the charismatic has the last word is inaccurate and problematic in a Church where collaborative ministry between the ordained and non-ordained members is yet to be fully implemented. For this reason, I maintain that the hierarchical and the charismatic structures of the Church equally count in all aspects of its life and mission. This position is informed by Augustine's affirmations that the divine persons work together in building up the Church. The Word and the Spirit in that case should, therefore, bear the last word in the Church.

Another cause for concern that has generated an ongoing debate in the Church is the question of the relationship between the universal Church and the local churches. The interest on this issue is widespread following the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's assertion that the universal Church "is not the result of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential mystery, it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church."¹² As one of the outspoken critics of this statement, Cardinal Walter Kasper regards the universal Church's claim to ontological and temporal priority as part of its scheme to exercise centralization over all the local churches. Consequently, it is more difficult, in his view, for the local churches and the bishops in particular to act responsibly on the specific needs of their faithful. For Kasper, such a trend has its own negative effects on the Church as a whole because "such 'unifying' activities and processes have gone too far."

The right balance between the universal and the particular churches has been destroyed. This is not only my own

11 Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion," (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), 9.

perception; it is the experience and complaint of many bishops from all over the world.¹³

There is clearly an imbalance between the universal Church and the local churches in the way they relate to each other and discuss issues of interest. In some cases the universal Church has authorized the appointments of pastors, introduced new liturgical rubrics and translations, and imposed guidelines on catechesis and formation without proper consideration of the situation of the local churches. On the other hand, the local churches, as Kasper also indicated have abdicated their responsibility and turned to the universal Church for decision.

In light of these sensitive and complicated dispensations, various proposals are presented to redress the imbalance between the universal Church and the local churches. The proposal Kasper advanced on a general level is for “each bishop to be granted enough vital space to make responsible decisions in the matter of implementing universal laws.”¹⁴ On my part, I would caution against granting individual bishops such a freedom without deference to a higher office based on how some bishops have imposed their personal ambitions over the local church. Elochukwu Uzukwu would share Kasper’s position in reference to the local church in Africa. In fact, he supports the idea of the existence of an autonomous African church. According to him,

the redefinition of the relationship implies the adoption of a necessary distance by the church in Africa towards the Latin Patriarchate, without prejudice to the primacy of the chair of Peter. This distance is necessary to maintain the

¹³ Cardinal Walter Kasper, “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,” In *America* 184 (April 23-30, 2001): 11.

¹⁴ Kasper, “On the Church,” 10.

tension between autonomy and communion in the one Church.¹⁵

In my view, what should rather be strengthened in order to address the imbalance between the universal Church and the African church is the bond of communion and spirit of solidarity between them. For this reason, I maintain that the emphasis should be on African church's particularity and not its autonomy from the universal Church. Once the African church can embrace its particularity and effectively use its unique gifts and resources from the Spirit to enrich the universal Church, the trend of isolation and imposition will be reversed in due course to one of collaboration.

There are several contributions that this article on the significance of Augustine's theology of the Spirit for communion ecclesiology provides for a more authentic understanding of the nature, life, and mission of the Church. The first major contribution to ecclesiology is acknowledging the Spirit as the source of the Church's visible and invisible communion: the Spirit is identified as the source of communion between the divine persons of the Trinity and the Church, the universal and the local churches, and among the diverse members of Christ's Body, the Church. Since Vatican II, the idea that the Church is a communion of the members of Christ's Body is quite prominent in the magisterial documents of the Church. In fact, a conscious step is taken by the Magisterium in its writings to present the nature of the Church as a communion of life and love with the divine community of the Trinity. For instance, the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops was emphatic about the Church's communion as a fundamental concept of the Council's document. In addition, the CDF also noted that "the concept of communion lies at the heart of the Church's self understanding insofar as it is the Mystery of the personal union of each human being with the divine Trinity."¹⁶ However, the

¹⁵ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1996), 59.

¹⁶ CDF, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church," 3.

Magisterium is not specific in identifying the Spirit as the source of communion in these recent documents in spite of its teaching on communion ecclesiology. In light of this, Augustine's insight identifies the Spirit as the Church's principle of unity. The ultimate aim is to re-create an awareness about the Spirit as the fundamental source of communion so that the members of the Church will realize what inherently unites them in the Trinity.

The second contribution that emerges from my discussion of the function of the Spirit in the Church as the source of communion is the exposition of the Church's unity in diversity. Both the unity and diversity of the universal Church and local churches, as well as the cultures and gifts of the members are underscored in this exercise to illustrate that unity in the Church is not meant to represent uniformity. For Augustine,

unity is the strength of every multitude; and a multitude, unless it is bound together by unity, is quarrelsome and torn by disputes; but a harmonious multitude makes one soul, as in fact those who received the Holy Spirit, as Scripture says, *had one soul and one heart in God* (Acts 4:32).¹⁷

An important aspect of Augustine's form of communion ecclesiology that, in my view, is underestimated in the above statement is his affirmation of the Church's unity in diversity. In this passage, he did not only highlight the Church's unity, but also the harmonious multitude of the Church's constitution. The nature of the Church's communion in the Spirit is, thus, depicted in this essay as a unity in diversity that is modeled on the unity of the divine persons. For this reason, each member of the Church is required to retain and enhance his or her uniqueness within the unity that the Spirit creates in the Church. Consequently, there should be mutual respect and cooperation for all the different gifts,

¹⁷ St. Augustine, "Sermon 272.2," In *Sermons III/7 (230-272B) on the Liturgical Seasons*, 305.

cultures, and languages that prevail among the members of the Church. Such forms of disposition cannot spontaneously be created, in my view, by the hierarchical or visible structure of the Church unless the Spirit inspires the members to treasure and celebrate their unity and diversity of gifts.

The Spirit is not only shown in this article to be the unifying and animating principle of the Church's unity in diversity, it is also portrayed as one that is common to all the members regardless of their vocation or status. In that case, the members of the Church are fundamentally equal and gifted by the Spirit they share in common. An insight of such importance will encourage the full participation of all the members in the life and mission of the Church in order to realize their potential and communion in the Spirit. This discourse, therefore, provides the grounds for the members of the Church to promote unity in diversity and be more involved in the life and mission of the Church according to their charisms. The real challenge for all members will be to discover their gifts and effectively use these gifts to enhance the Spirit's unifying mission in the whole Church.

In addition to the above contributions, an objective and positive view of the charismatic structure of the Church is provided as an indispensable element of the life of the Church. This project affirms that the Church is charismatic in nature from its origins and constitution because of the Spirit's defining feature in the life and ministry of the Church. The charismatic structure is, in that sense, a permanent aspect of the Church as a result of the Spirit's ongoing impact in the Church's formation and renewal. For this reason, the whole Church should be considered charismatic in form and dimension, and not only a few members who are gifted with spectacular charisms such as prophecy, the gift of tongues, and discernment of spirits. These charisms are expressions or signs of the charismatic structure of the Church, but they are a limited understanding of the Church's charismatic constitution. In this article, the charismatic structure is brought to the fore of the

Church's self-understanding in order to provide a broader meaning to the concept of charism.

Considering the situation of the Church today, it is important, in my view, to preserve the charismatic structure of the Church. This is because "an overemphasis on the institutional element in the Church has sometimes been to the detriment of effective service."¹⁸ As a way of encouraging other forms of ministry and service in the Church, the charismatic gifts of the non-ordained members of the Church is valued and endorsed. The possibility of adopting the extremes of a Spirit-based church that is opposed to the hierarchical nature of the Church is well excluded in my discussion of the charismatic structure and the Spirit's function as the Church's source of communion. There is no opposition between the hierarchical authority of the Church that represents the Word and the Church's charismatic element that signifies the Spirit. An insight of this nature will clearly enable the members of the Church to see the hierarchical and charismatic structures of the Church in a more positive light.

Finally, my thesis that the Spirit is the source of communion and that there is unity in diversity of gifts will spur the local churches, especially the African church to discover their unique identity in the communion of the Spirit. Considering the Spirit's unifying function and the unique charismatic gifts it confers on each local church, I strongly believe that the emphasis for the African church should be more on its particularity than its autonomy. The gifts and resources of this local church should likewise be used for the good of the whole in order to strengthen its communion with the universal Church. This form of mutual exchange of gifts is greatly weakened, in my view, if the local church is autonomous from the universal Church.

On this remarkable and contentious subject of the local church in Africa, I differ from Elochukwu Uzukwu. In contrast to his position which supports an autonomous African church, I propose

¹⁸ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 155.

that the African church should emphasize its particularity and also use its resources to strengthen its communion with the universal Church. In his book titled *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, he argued for an autonomous African church that is “free and dependent on its own resources” and maintained that “only a local church that is aware of its autonomy and universal mission may hope to be a challenge to the world.”¹⁹ From my point of view, the African church should, rather, value and emphasize its particularity more than its autonomy because autonomy is not obtainable where the Spirit is the source of communion with the universal Church. Properly understood, particularity specifically denotes the distinctive characteristics of a local church within a cultural, historical, and geographical setting that signify and embody the church’s identity, constitution, and experience among other members of the universal Church. These unique features, that I believe are gifts of the Spirit, are what readily determine and define the local church’s image, heritage, and contribution towards the universal Church. The particularity of a local church in that case includes the cultural values, spiritual experience, and the charisms of its members. Autonomy on the other hand connotes self-sufficiency which is different from particularity because the latter is first of all about the unique identity of the African church. Secondly, it concerns the use of the African church’s gifts from the Spirit to enrich the universal Church and strengthen the communion between them.

As a church whose potential is yet to be realized in the life of the universal Church, I suggest that the African church should emphasize its particularity rather than its autonomy. Towards this end, it is important to identify the aspects and sets of values that define and also distinguish the African church. These qualities include the following: the sense of community life, the centrality of life and family in African culture, and the dynamic nature of

¹⁹ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, 48.

Africa's liturgical celebration. These represent in various ways the identity and particularity of the African church in communion with the universal Church. This essay invites further research and dialogue among the pastors, theologians, and all members of the African church on the merits of this church's heritage for the good of the universal Church.

Conclusion

The main focus of this essay on the significance of Augustine's theology of the Spirit for communion ecclesiology is on the Spirit as the unifying and animating principle of the life and mission of the Church. This is due to the fact that the Spirit is properly the Spirit of life as well as the bond of love that animates and unites the whole Church. Since the Church is essentially a communion of diverse members in unity with the divine persons of the Trinity, it is my thesis that the Spirit is specifically the one who uniquely functions as the source of the Church's visible and invisible communion. Therefore, the unity between the divine community and the Church, the universal and local churches, and the hierarchical and charismatic structures of the Church should be acknowledged as the work of the Spirit. Towards this end that demands a proper insight into the particularity and function of the Spirit, I have considered Augustine's perspective on this subject to account for what the Spirit does in the Church. The Spirit clearly functions as the source of communion in the Church and it is because of the Spirit I insisted that unity is not opposed to diversity in the Church. Augustine's perspective is, therefore, significant because it establishes the unity, diversity, and cooperation that ought to exist in the Catholic Church as a whole. For this reason, no one liturgical rite or language should prevail in the Church. Since the Church is modelled on the Trinity, the Church should be a unity of diverse members who are equal, irrespective of their background.

The challenge that this insight, therefore, poses to each member of the Church is to use their charismatic gifts for the good of the whole Church and to foster the Spirit's unifying mission. Augustine certainly emphasized the importance of each member's contribution towards the life and mission of the Church because he affirmed that the Spirit is the supreme gift of God that is common to all the members of the Church. There is ultimately no other gift that is greater or more important than the Spirit. Some members cannot, therefore, be active in the Church while others are passive because the Spirit is common to all members. Those who are active cannot, consequently, monopolize this Spirit, in my view, because the Spirit is primarily the everlasting gift of the Father and the Son to the Church. In that sense, the Spirit is free and unlimited on its own to fulfill its mission in the Church. At the same time, the Spirit can use the services of other members of the Church as well. The idea that the Spirit is common to all the members of the Church is, therefore, significant in my estimation, because it enables each member of the Church to respond to the promptings of the Spirit. Such awareness is necessary towards the full use of all the charismatic gifts of the members at different levels of the Church.

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FEATURES

The Second Synod of Bishops for Africa: A Review of the some of the major points discussed¹

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Introduction

The Church has a very long and venerable tradition of meeting in councils and synods. From the first council of Jerusalem which was reported in Acts 15 to the Second Vatican Council these councils have provided the Church with the settings and opportunities of either resolving particular issues of doctrine or morality or of charting pastoral courses for more effective governance of the Church or for the evangelization of peoples. The present synodal process in the Church is, however, the direct result of a *motu proprio*, *Apostolica Sollicitudo* issued by Pope Paul VI on September 15, 1965.² In this text Paul VI called for the establishment of “a permanent council of bishops for the universal Church, to be directly and immediately subject to our power. Its proper name will be the Synod of Bishops.” The aims of the synod of bishops, as stated in *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, are “to promote a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world; to see to it that accurate and direct information is supplied on matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action that [she] should be carrying on in today’s world; to facilitate agreement, at least on some essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church.” The final

¹ The 2nd Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was held 4- 25 October, 2009

² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/motu_proprio/documets/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio...

text of the conciliar decree of the Second Vatican Council on the office of bishops in the Church which was approved on October 28, 1965 also has a passage on the synod of bishops. It reads: "Bishops chosen from different parts of the world... will give more effective and helpful service to the supreme pastor of the church by meeting in a council which will be called the *synod of bishops*. Acting on behalf of the whole Catholic episcopate, it will show that all the bishops in hierarchical communion participate in the care of the whole church."³

There are a number of points to note here. The first is that the synod of bishops is intended as "a participation in the 'solicitude for the Universal Church' proper to the bishop of Rome." It is a means by which the bishop of Rome as chief shepherd exercises more effectively his ministry of leading "the people of God to eternal pastures," in closer collaboration with the bishops of the whole Church "whom the Spirit has placed ... to rule the Church of God."⁴ The second point which follows from this is that the synod of bishops which held in Rome in October 2009 was an exercise of the universal Church and not just an African thing, hence, its proper title: The second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of bishops. This is an important point to make since for some people what happened in Rome from 5 – 25 October, 2009 was a synod of Africa, a gathering of African bishops, albeit under the watchful eyes of the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome to deliberate on the African Church. Thus, for such people, this was one more evidence of the fact of African dependence on or subjugation by Rome. This is not correct. The truth is that since the end of Vatican II the synod of bishops has met at intervals to

³ Vatican Council II, *De episcoporum munere* (on the office of bishops) also known as *Christus Dominus*, in the *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils, vol II: Trent*, ed Norman P. Tanner (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 922.

⁴ Cf *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, op.cit.

deliberate on one aspect of the Church's life or the other.⁵ Thus there have been synods dedicated to the examination of particular regions of the world: Africa, America, Europe, Oceania and Asia. In this line, there will be a synod on the Middle East sometime this year, 2010. Africa is not unique in this post conciliar era since it is not the only region which has had two synods devoted to it. Europe, at least has had the same number. And, if one were to add the special assembly on the Netherlands then it could be said that there have been about three synods on Europe. Even so, the question on the minds of many people when Pope John Paul II, on November 13, 2004, declared his intention to convoke a second special assembly for Africa of the synod of bishops was why? Why do we need to have another such synod after only a fifteen year interval? What happened to all the good ideas which were voiced at the first synod which took place in 1994? Has that synod run its course?

Here is how the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the synod which was presented to Africa by Pope Benedict XVI on his trip to Cameroon on March 19, 2009 tried to justify a second synod for Africa: "Since the last synodal assembly, held in 1994, African society has undergone a significant change. Generally speaking, some basic, human problems exist. However, there are signs which call for a thorough examination of questions highlighted 15 years ago, in the religious, political, economic and cultural spheres."⁶ The *Instrumentum Laboris* also tries to provide further justification for the second synod in another passage in these words: "The pastors in Africa, in union with the Bishop of Rome, who presides over the universal communion in charity, feel that further discussion needs to be done on the problems already treated at the

⁵ For a comprehensive listing of all synods from after Vatican II to date, see http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_20050309_documentation_profile_en.html#C_ordo_synodi_Episcoporum the order of the synod of Bishops

⁶ Synod of Bishops, "2nd Special Assembly for Africa." *Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City, 2009), no.6, p.3.

preceding Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and taken up in the post synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. The present synod then is to be considered in continuing dynamic of the preceding one. This is also the case with not only the subjects to be discussed collegially but the Christian perspective required.”⁷ These two passages suggest that there is continuity and new perspectives between the second and first synods. Although, the second synod is not just a continuation of the first or as a friend of mine would say, “first synod of Africa light” as in Coca or Pepsi light, implying a less dense or less toxic version of the main product, it presupposes a lot of the issues and discussions which happened at the first synod. In many ways, the Africa of 1994 and the Africa of 2009 were still the same: poor, badly governed for the most part, riddled with corruption; wracked by so many seemingly unending wars, violent conflicts and ethnic strife. In many ways, however, the Africa of 2009 was new and full of new opportunities and challenges for the Church. The challenge before the Bishops and participants of second synod was how to be a better steward of the African reality by helping the gospel put behind it some of the negative tendencies both acquired and structural which are pulling it down while helping the continent chart a course for true faith, peace, and prosperity in this new millennium, hence the theme of the synod: *The Church in Africa In Service To Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*. “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the World*” (Mt 5:13, 14).

From the First Synod to the Second Synod

The first African synod was focused around one priority: mission. There were discussions on various aspects of mission: proclamation, dialogue, justice and peace, communication, inculturation. Borrowing from *Gaudium et Spes* the synod saw the Church in Africa as the Family of God; a family made so by one

⁷ *Instrumentum Laboris*, no.15.

faith, one baptism, one Lord and which shared a bond on the basis of the blood of Christ into whom we are all baptized into this family. There was a concerted attempt to stress unity of Christians, and to show that as Archbishop Obiefuna of Onitsha at the time quipped "the waters of baptism are thicker than the blood of ethnicity."

Reading through the apostolic exhortation which Pope John Paul II issued after the first synod one is struck by the sense of optimism which characterized this synod. Here are two remarkable passages from *Ecclesia in Africa* to buttress my point. In article 6, the Pope is exhorting the African Church to embark on its mission with optimism: "It seems that the 'hour of Africa' has come, a favorable time which urgently invites Christ's messengers to launch out into the deep and to cast their nets for the catch...today, the Church of Africa, joyful and grateful for having received the faith, must pursue its evangelizing mission..." (EA 6). In another remarkable passage the Pope talks of the first Synod as a synod of resurrection and hope:

This was indeed a Synod of Resurrection and Hope, as the Synod Fathers joyfully and enthusiastically declared in the opening words of their *Message* to the People of God...: "Like Mary Magdalene on the morning of the Resurrection, like the disciples at Emmaus with burning hearts and enlightened minds, the Special Synod for Africa, Madagascar and the Islands proclaims: *Christ, our Hope, is risen. He has met us, has walked along with us.* He has explained the Scriptures to us. Here is what he said to us: 'I am the First and the Last, I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever and I hold the keys of death and of the abode of the dead' (*Rev 1:17-18*) ... And as Saint John at Patmos during particularly difficult times received prophecies of hope for the People of God, we also announce a message of hope. At this time when so much fratricidal hate inspired by political interests is tearing our

peoples apart, when the burden of the international debt and currency devaluation is crushing them, we, the Bishops of Africa, together with all the participants in this holy Synod, united with the Holy Father and with all our Brothers in the Episcopate who elected us, we want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, Family of God in Africa, to you, the Family of God all over the world: *Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!*" (EA 11).

What was remarkable about these passages was that they were authored even after the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Although this event cast a long shadow on the floor and mood of the synod it did not seem to have dampened the faith of the synod fathers in the possibility of what President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa would later dub the "African Renaissance." The synod fathers knew that all was not well with Africa, and if they needed any reminder then they did not have far to look: many African countries were then under military dictatorship, Rwanda was witnessing a carnage, Liberia was unstable. Yet they could look around and see the African Church and civic societies everywhere stirring up to take control of their destiny and their continent. There was hope. God is alive, and a Church with firm hope in the resurrection could provide the impetus for a true African renaissance in which cultures were transformed and made more Christian and more humane through the project of inculturation; peace was achievable through dialogue with all aspects of society and with Islam; and the mission of the Church to bring salvation to the entire continent would be achieved through effective use of the modern means of communication – the radio, TV, internet, etc.

The second synod for Africa had a remarkable different tone than the first. Although the post apostolic exhortation is yet to be published it is clear even from the *Message (Nuntius)* of this synod that the tone of the synod was a somber one. Here are some lines from the *Message*:

We live in a world full of contradictions and deep crisis.... In all this, Africa is the most hit. Rich in human and natural resources many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and conflicts, crisis and chaos. These are very rarely caused by natural disasters. They are largely due to human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good and this often through a tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy of local leaders and foreign interests.⁸

This sombre note is even evident in the homily which the Pope gave at the opening mass of the synod. He warned that the “deep sense of God” which makes the continent “the repository of an inestimable treasure for the whole world” was itself under attack from at least two dangerous pathologies: (a) practical materialism, combined with relativist and nihilist thinking, and (b) a “religious fundamentalism, mixed with political and economic interests by which groups who follow various religious creeds are spreading throughout the continent of Africa: they do so in God’s name, but follow a logic that is opposed to divine logic, that is, teaching and practicing not love and respect for freedom, but intolerance and violence.” This homily was a clarion call to all and sundry that Africa was in danger on various fronts. What was at stake was the very survival of the continent as a distinct cultural, religious and political entity. It was with this understanding that the synod went to work.

The work which the second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa did in three weeks is simply stunning. To do justice to this synod one would have to comb through every intervention by every synod father and by every auditor as well as all the reports by various officials of the synod, the reports of various small groups (*circuli minores*) and even the yet to be

⁸ Synodus Episcoporum, II Coetus Specialis Pro Africa, *Nuntius* (E civitate Vaticana, 2009), no.4, 5), p.2.

published post synodal exhortation. The scope of this essay, however, is a limited one, namely, to provide a synopsis of the discussions at the synod. This task too is rather too broad for the same reasons as I have already stated above. There were discussions on virtually anything, or every institution, which has something to do with the stated theme of the synod: justice, the Church, dialogue with other religions in Africa; peace in Africa and in other parts of the world; poverty, insecurity, politics and good governance; the challenge of new religious movements in Africa; the family, the laity, priests, consecrated persons, all in service of or as challenges to peace and reconciliation in Africa, etc. I will present some of the main issues discussed at the synod in a number of clusters in order to provide as realistic a picture of events as I can. In carrying out my task I will rely heavily on the final list of propositions which were approved and sent to the Pope for his consideration after the synod as well as on other non-published materials which are available for use at this time.

Clusters of Themes

In the initial report to the synod before the discussions and debates (*relatio ante disceptationem*), the general relator of the synod, Cardinal Peter Turkson, Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, took the assembly through a thorough and well-researched discussion on reconciliation which is the main theme of the synod. Turkson pointed out that reconciliation, scripturally speaking, “is a divine initiative, a free and gratuitous move from God” which is intended to restore communion between God and humanity.⁹ Experience of reconciliation establishes communion on two levels: communion with God and humanity. Thus reconciliation “is not just limited to God’s drawing of estranged humanity to himself in Christ through the settlement of differences and the removal of obstacles to their

⁹ See Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, *Relatio Ante Disceptationem* (Synodus Episcoporum II Coetus Specialis Pro Africa, E Civitate Vaticana, 2009), p.16

relationships. This indeed, is the distinctive feature of reconciliation in the mystery of Christ.”¹⁰

By choosing as the theme for the synod the famous Pauline passage on reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-20), the African church was acknowledging the need for healing of relationships in Africa, both vertically and horizontally. Peoples and institutions were at odds with each other; there is lack of justice on the continent hence the lack of peace and progress. This Corinthian passage taken together with the passage from Mathew 5: 14, 15 implies a certain self understanding of the church as a community with a mission of reconciliation to Africa. The Church was thus inviting itself to rise up to its duty as ambassador of reconciliation through peace and justice in the entire continent.

Cluster 1: Ecclesiology

The second African synod was very much an ecclesiological synod. Although, it did not set out to elaborate a new ecclesiology, the synod spent a lot of time discussing the nature, mission, and spirituality of ecclesial communion in Africa. The African church at this second synod was a church which was searching in openness and sincerity for the ways to understand its nature as church and its mission of service in relation to the world around it. The picture which emerges is thus like the pictures of the Church in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* rolled into one. As in *Lumen Gentium* this synod took a good look at the various constitutive elements of the Church family of God in Africa to see how they relate or can relate to each other in service of reconciliation, justice and peace on the continent. There were two broad parts to this search. The first part had to do with the internal life of the church. In this regard, there was a lot of discussion on the need for ongoing conversion at all levels in the church, the need to find ways to live justly in the church and among all entities in the church, the need to

¹⁰ Cardinal Turkon, *Relatio Ante Discepcionem*, p.19

find ways to ensure effective involvement of all the members of the Church in the Church, the need to find ways not only to bring more people into the Church in Africa but also keep them there as fully active and participating members, and the need to respect the various competences of the constitutive elements. Hence, there were discussions on the role of bishops (proposition 3), priests (114), laity (106), deacons (121), consecrated persons (124), catechists (128), etc as agents of reconciliation, justice and peace on the continent and in the work of evangelization. The synod was aware that as Paul VI put it in 1975 preaching alone does not move people anymore. Rather, people are moved by those who live what they preach: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."¹¹ Speaking in the same vein, an earlier synod counsels that "everyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes."¹² The Church in Africa cannot be an effective and credible agent of reconciliation justice and peace if it is lacking in these qualities and virtues within itself.

Conversion for the effective ministry of reconciliation is not just a structural issue. There were two aspects to the question of conversion: personal and communal. Since it is people who make up the Church, the most important conversion was that of the heart of the individual member of the Church. A most essential means for reconciliation is through the sacrament of penance. There was considerable mention on the synod floor of the need to help the believers find their way back to this very important sacrament. Propositions 8 and 9 not only stress this need but also very significantly call for Africa wide days or even year of reconciliation during which private and communal acts of reconciliation would be undertaken and Christians would "ask God

¹¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, art. 41.

¹² "Justice in the World" (Synod of Bishops, 1971), in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, edited by David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), p.287.

for special pardon for all hurts and wounds inflicted upon each other.”

In *Lumen Gentium*, and indeed in all the documents of Vatican II, several descriptive terms are employed to put across the different concepts of the Church. Thus the Church is sometimes described as servant, a hierarchical community, a communion, the new Israel of God, the people of God, an eschatological community, etc. One of these metaphors is always more operative in a given church at any given time than the others. This self understanding of any particular church determines to a large extent what kind of Church one gets. For example, the sub title of the theme of this synod is “you are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world” (Mt 5 13, 14). In the main, this synod is a Church which is beginning to appreciate itself as a leaven. The Church of the second African synod was seriously looking for ways to be effectively salt and light to the African continent. Aside from individual conversion and holiness, or rather in addition to these, there was also the need to put in place structures or to strengthen existing mechanisms which are already in place for the task of evangelization, peace and reconciliation.

Proposition 3 maintains that to be effective as an agent of reconciliation the church as such must preserve communion within and among all its constituent entities. Ecclesial communion must be evident, “in the Bishops” effective and affective collegiality in their Ecclesiastical Provinces and at the national, regional, continental and international levels.”¹³ This proposition (no. 3) is interesting in that it captures the widespread concern for more effective regional bodies like the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SEICAM) and the Confederation of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM) and directs that these continental and regional groupings should try and cooperate more closely in the work of evangelization, reconciliation and peace in Africa.

¹³ Cf. *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum*, propositio 3.

The ecclesiology of second synod for Africa is in many remarkable ways akin also to that of *Gaudium et Spes*. Two aspects of *Gaudium et Spes* remarkably inform the ecclesiology of the second Synod for Africa. The first is that as in *Gaudium et Spes*, the African church at this synod understood itself to be intimately linked with humanity (especially in Africa) and its history¹⁴. The Second point follows from the first. Thus, “although the role of the Church is primarily a religious one, from this religious mission comes ‘a light and energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law’¹⁵.” The Church’s religious ministry is to be fulfilled in a way “that protects human dignity, fosters human rights and contributes to the unity of the human family.”¹⁶ This aspect of the understanding of the Church is evident in the extensive discussion on good governance, politics and elections (propositions 23-25), African inter-governmental and diplomatic activity, arms trade, and peace.

Cluster 2: Leadership and Related Issues.

Politics, governance and public service and such matters received a good deal of attention on the main floor of the synod, in the discussions at the various small groups, and the various reports of the principal officers of the synod. There was recognition at this synod that, as Chinua Achebe wrote in the *Trouble with Nigeria*, the trouble with Africa is leadership. The synod spent a lot of energy pondering over what the Church can do to help this situation. The recognition was clear that Catholics and other Christian public servants are often no better stewards of public trust and treasure than others in Africa. Considering that many of these

¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

¹⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 42.

¹⁶ J. Bryan Hehir, “The Social Role of the Church: Leo XIII, Vatican II and John Paul II,” in *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order: Building on One Hundred Years*, edited by Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houch (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre dame Press, 1993), p.38

corrupt public officials are members of the various Christian churches in Africa the synod fathers were openly asking: Where have we gone wrong, and what can we do as a church?

Aside from exhorting the various African leaders to play by the rules of democracy, to respect human rights and to uphold the common good over family, personal, ethnic, political and sectional interest in their work the synod also made concrete proposals as to how the Church intends to help reform politics and bring about good governance in Africa. The first was through the conscientization of the citizenry. The synod urged the various Episcopal Conferences “to promote multidimensional programs of civic education; implement programs to foster the formation of a social conscience at all levels; and encourage competent and honest citizens to participate in party politics” (proposition 24). Secondly, and with specific reference to the lay Catholic faithful, the synod stressed the need for intense and ongoing catechesis which would provide them the opportunity “for a conversion of heart”. The Church would undertake the training of Catholic politicians and those in politics, and economic and social leadership positions on the social doctrine of the Church (proposition 36). Priests and religious too must be properly trained in the social doctrine of the church since they too serve as advisers and counsellors to the lay faithful who are engaged in the public square. Third, the Church would establish chaplaincies and appoint suitable chaplains for those in public office. Fourth, Catholic universities are to be encouraged to found departments of political science in which sound principles of politics including those based on Catholic Social teaching would be given pride of place (proposition 24). Five, the synod urged various Episcopal Conferences at all levels “to establish advocacy bodies to lobby members of parliament, governments and international institutions” as a way the church “can contribute effectively to the formulation of just laws and policies for the people’s good” (proposition 23). Six, the synod urged the various groupings of bishops to support the African

Union's NEPAD,¹⁷ Peer Review mechanism and the review of the Maputo Protocol to ensure that it does not contain provisions which are anti-life (proposition 19).

Cluster 3: Dialogue and Collaboration with other Religions and Interest Groups

The search for reconciliation and peace in Africa is a multifaceted concern which involves the Church in dialogue with various other religions and groups on the continent. In this regard, Islam and African traditional religions came in for particular mention at the synod. Number II of the Final list of propositions which is on Inter-religious dialogue opens the section on dialogue with the following words: "Peace in Africa and other parts of the world is very much determined by the relations among religions....Dialogue with other religions, especially Islam and African Traditional Religion, is an integral part of the proclamation of the Gospel and the Church's pastoral activity on behalf of reconciliation and peace." This is a remarkable passage in that it sees reconciliation as integral to the work of evangelization. Peace is necessary. And, to sit down to talk to people who do not believe what we believe is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is recognition of the plural nature of the African society in which Christians and others live and work. The two religions here mentioned are not seen as challenges or problems but as neighbours who are worthy of respect and with whom Christianity could work together for peace in Africa. One of the synod fathers acknowledged the progress in Muslim-Christian relations in Africa: "We have made progress in building upon the general sense which Muslims and Christians in Africa have of belonging to the same families, communities and nations. We have learnt to join hands to address common challenges on the basis of

¹⁷ NEPAD stands for *New Economic Partnership for African Development*. The Peer Review Mechanism is the process by which governments reassessed for their performance particularly with the set objectives of NEPAD such as democratic governance and sound economic stewardship.

commonly shared spiritual and moral values, which, we discover, often with joyful surprise, whenever we open our hearts and minds to one another.” This prelate went on to cite the successes which Christians and Muslims have had in some joint efforts in Africa – the fight against HIV/AIDS in Uganda, the program to eradicate malaria in Nigeria, interventions for conflict resolution and peace building in Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire and Niger.¹⁸ In the proposition on Islam (no. 12) the synod issued several guidelines on the dialogue with Islam in Africa. First, priority must be given to the “dialogue of life and partnership in social matters and reconciliation.” The point here is that the dialogue with Islam is not a search for the lowest common denominators of the various faiths. It is not as if we were going to that dialogue intent on giving away the central beliefs of our faith or that we are going to ask Muslims to do the same. Rather, despite doctrinal differences we can agree on certain points about how to construct a humane and just world where people can live in peace together. Second, the synod directs that efforts be made in the formation programs of priests and religious to provide better knowledge of Islam for these future leaders and teachers of the Church. Third, the synod fathers believed that dialogue with Islam as with other religions in Africa would provide opportunity for eradicating or at least minimizing religious intolerance and violence (proposition 11).

Relations with African traditional religion received even greater mention in this synod. African Christianity has a unique opportunity of having to be in constant dialogue with a primal religion. This opportunity, as Kwame Bediako pointed out years ago, has been lost to European and American theologies. In Africa, as in other non-Western worlds, “the importance of the primal religions in the history” and formulation of Christian theology and

¹⁸ Archbishop John O. Onaiyekan, “Islam and the Church Family of God in Africa: Beyond Dialogue to Collaboration: in the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.”

pastoral practice can be seen for what it is.¹⁹ The synod fathers were aware of the gains for Christianity from African traditional religion and the challenges some aspects of the faith and practices this religion poses to authentic Christian faith. Thus, they ask for thorough and scientific research in African Traditional Religion in African Catholic universities and in the Catholic universities in Rome where many African Catholic leaders train. Also, they insist that the distinction has to be made between the cultural and religious in Africa and “especially between the cultural and those *malevolent* programs of sorcery, which cause the break-up and ruin of our families and our societies” (proposition 13). The synod asked that action be taken at various levels of the church against those involved in witchcraft and occultism.

Cluster 4: Women

There is only one proposition devoted to women as such in the final list of propositions sent to the Holy Father by the synod. A careful study of this one proposal reveals an enormous concern arising from the synod hall about the plight of many African women in Church and society. In a very telling passage in his report after the discussions (*relatio post disceptationem*), Cardinal Turkson, the Relator General of the synod, captured succinctly the feeling of the synod on women in Africa when he asserted that although women are making great strides in some African countries they remain “underdeveloped resources” in others, “suffering exclusion from social roles, inheritance, education, and decision-making places.” They remain “defenseless victims in war zones: victims of polygamous marriages, abused, trafficked for prostitution, etc.”²⁰

¹⁹ Cf Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), p.59

²⁰ Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, *Relatio Post Disceptationem* (E: Civitate Vaticana: Synodus Episcoporum II Coetus Specialis Pro Africa, 13 October 2009), p.6

There were quite a few women at the synod. Many of these were auditors, who, like the bishops appointed to the synod, were allowed to make interventions on the synod floor. Some others were invited as 'experts' and made their input through working with the Relator General and in the small discussion groups which were an essential part of the synod. Women spoke out clearly and very loudly at this synod. As was widely reported in the media, one of the women speakers invited the synod fathers to do a two minute exercise before they went to bed and to imagine what a church without women would look like. She argued that there was need for more collaboration between the ordained and women in the work of evangelization Africa. She says:

As well as teach catechism to children, decorate parish churches, clean, mend and sew vestments we the religious in Africa would like to be part of various parish councils. We do not want to remain at the periphery of the main body of the parish, we just want to be equal partners in the Lord's vineyard; we want to share in the Church's responsibility of ensuring reconciliation, peace and justice on our continent.²¹

Sister Harry's intervention although widely reported was not the most incisive intervention on women. There was a general feeling at this synod that something needs to be done and quickly to enhance the status of African women. Many bishops took the lead in articulating the structural impediments to true emancipation of women in Africa. Hence, there were discussions on marriage customs which place undue stress on women, on inheritance rights, on widowed women and the treatment they receive in some African societies. With regard to the church there was a lot of soul-searching on how to bring women on board in those areas of leadership and governance which are covered by Canon Law, as

²¹ "Religious Women in the Church in Africa," intervention by Sr. Felicia Harry, N.S.A (O.I.A.), Superior General of the Sisters of Our lady of Apostles, Ghana.

well as discussions on providing theological and other educational opportunities for women, etc. The concerns extended to all categories of women, lay, religious, married, single, etc. The question of trafficking of women was also raised. Tersely worded as it is, proposition 47 captures succinctly the widespread concern of the synod. Among other things, the synod proposed the creation of shelter for abused women, close collaboration between various Episcopal Conferences and other entities to stop the trafficking of women, greater integration of women into Church structures and decision-making processes, setting up of Diocesan commissions at various levels to address women's issues and to help them carry out their work in church and society, and the setting up of a study commission on women in the church, within the pontifical council for the family.

Cluster 5: Some Pressing Moral Concerns

There is sense in which everything discussed at the synod was a moral issue. However, for the sake of convenience I have decided to group some particular topics under this heading since they are obviously of normative concern. The first of these concerns is in regard to what was referred to at the synod as toxic elements or viruses which were being foisted on Africa from foreign sources. The first indication of this concern came from the very widely reported homily of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, at the opening mass of the synod. Other participants took up this issue as well. For example, Archbishop Robert Sarah,²² in his presentation was concerned with what he referred to as a new gender theory which was being imported into Africa and which was intent on doing away with traditional truths concerning the spousal identity of man and woman in marriage, the complementary nature of this relationship between man and woman in marriage, the issue of

²² Archbishop Sarah is the emeritus Archbishop of Conakry Guinea and now Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples at the Vatican City.

maternity and paternity in the human family, and procreation.²³ This gender ideology also denies the sexual classification into male and female as intrinsic to human biological identity. On the contrary it posits that the identification of male and female is only a social construct with no intrinsic worth except as an oppressive cultural imposition which does not allow the individual to choose his or her sexual orientation and makes homosexuality an open and culturally acceptable lifestyle. Sarah is concerned this gender ideology is being imposed on Africans through the manipulation of the legislative process and through privileged access to the information media by which information on homosexuality, abortion and contraception are spread ostensibly in the name of “reproductive health” for women and in the name of civil rights for homosexual persons. He believes that the gender ideology being peddled by these foreign agencies is contrary to African culture and to the gospel and is undermining the view of family and married life which Africans have nurtured and preserved intact until the present time thus destabilizing African societies.

The synod also expressed these same concerns with regard to foreign negative influences on Africa when in the *Nuntius* it denounced “all surreptitious attempts to destroy and undermine the precious African value of family and human life.”²⁴ The synod had particularly harsh words for the Maputo Protocol.²⁵ Although the

²³ La théorie du genre est une idéologie sociologisante occidentale des relations hommes-femmes, qui s'attaque à l'identité sponsale de la personne humaine, à la complémentarité anthropologique entre l'homme et la femme, au mariage, à la maternité et la paternité, à la famille et à la procréation. Elle est contraire à la culture africaine et aux vérités humaines éclairées par la Révélation divine en Jésus Christ. (This quotation is taken from the synodal intervention of Archbishop Sarah entitled “L'église et la théorie du genre en Afrique.”)

²⁴ Synodus Episcoporum: II Coetus Specialis Pro Africa, *Nuntius* (H. Civitate Vaticana, 2009), 11.

²⁵ Technically known as “The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa,” but called the “Maputo Protocol” because it was adopted during a 2003 summit in the Mozambique capital city. As John Allen points out in the *National Catholic Reporter* of

Fathers of the synod were in agreement with the bulk of the rights the protocol tries to secure for women, they out rightly reject Article 14 which is devoted to health and reproductive rights, asserting a right to abortion “in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the fetus.”²⁶ The *Nuntius* refers to this article as “obnoxious” and the final list of propositions condemned the position of the Protocol on abortion while maintaining that the value and dignity of human life must be protected “from the moment of conception to natural death.” (pp.20).

Other specifically moral issues of concern to the synod include migration, poverty, the arms trade, drugs and substance abuse, capital punishment, treatment of prisoners, religious liberty, ethnicity, concern for the environment, mineral resources, land and water resources, etc. The synod was aware that several issues are at the root of the challenges and problems in these areas. These include bad governance, injustice and, in some cases, bad or negative effects of globalization. In this situation, the synod called for conversion. For, as the *Nuntius* points out, true reconciliation, justice and peace can only come “from a change of heart, and a change of heart comes from conversion to the Gospel.”²⁷

October 11, [2009] The Maputo Protocol “is an adjunct to a charter of the African Union on human rights. Elaborated in twenty-five articles, it guarantees a host of rights to Africa’s women, such as social and political equality, voting rights, and an end to genital mutilation. The protocol legally came into force on November 25, 2005, after having been ratified by the required fifteen member states of the African Union.” cf, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/ghost-maputo-protocol-hangs-over-african-synod>

²⁶Cf, [http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Protocol on the Rights of Women.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Protocol%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Women.pdf)

²⁷ *Nuntius*, p.5.

Conclusion

As already indicated, what has been presented so far does not even begin to do justice to the sheer size and scope of work undertaken by this synod. For example, I did not say anything about the discussions on the economy, HIV/AIDS, the family, youth, malaria, the media and education. The discussion so far is simply meant to show the extent of concern the second synod for Africa and the entire church has for the present and the future of Africa.

From the work of the synodal fathers, we see a church which is aware of the great gifts which it has been given by God. We see a Church which is aware that it has something to offer to Africa and to the world. We see a Church which has grown in greater understanding of its role as leaven or catalyst. There becomes evident a great cry of disappointment for the Church's failure so far to live up to its promise in Africa, for Africa and for the whole world; a Church which is determined as ever to be light and leaven and to seek cooperation in doing so with other African and international entities. There is a great sense of urgency here for people to go home and begin the work of the "new Pentecost" as this synod has been variously described.

We are still waiting for the post synodal exhortation from His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. But even as the Church awaits this final word from the Pope the Spirit who is at work in his Church will already begin to move people to action in ways and directions they may not even be aware but which lead us all closer to the truth. During a press conference at the end of the disputed elections which brought George W. Bush to power a reporter said to President Clinton, in these or similar words: "Mr. President, the American people have spoken.!" Clinton responded quickly, "Yes, but we are yet to figure out what they said!" Every synod as an ecclesial event is packed with meaning. Although the Spirit has spoken, it will take time to understand more clearly what the Spirit said.

Church, Politics, Conscience, and Power: The Moral Dimension to Nigeria's Democratic Renewal

By

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Abstract

The question of the just relation between Church and State is a hot-button issue any day. Over the centuries the Church struggled, against the omnipotent State, to maintain her freedom to carry out her divine mission. The integrity of this mission, this writer argues, imposes on the Church an imperative moral duty to be politically involved; especially in a context like Nigeria with very weak institutions of civil society. He further argues that the role of the Church is to bring the moral dimension to bear on Nigeria's politics where it has been tragically lacking; a challenge which he crystallizes into five tasks: the politics of identity, the establishment of a viable work ethic, and an ethic of responsibility, solidarity in human promotion, and the conduct of credible elections.

Introduction

My title is simply an expansion and modification of the topic "Church and Politics," which was assigned to me by the synod committee of the diocese of Nsukka. By this modification and its sub-title I wish to suggest that 'Conscience' could serve as a metaphor for the Church; while 'power' could also serve as a metaphor for politics and by extension, the State. Essentially, I wish to argue (a) that the *specific* contribution which the Church can bring to bear on Nigeria's politics is the moral perspective; (b) that the democratic renewal of Nigeria will be impossible without her moral regeneration; and (c) that Nigeria's democratic renewal

will not begin until she can conduct credible elections, and thus capable of holding her officials accountable to the electorate.

My presentation will follow a predictable order. First, I will clarify the major terms of our discussion: Church, politics, conscience, moral dimension, and democratic renewal. Next, I will try to elucidate the peculiarities of the present status of Nigerian politics, those peculiarly Nigerian foibles that make a discourse pertaining to the country's politics such an engaging enterprise. Then I shall go on to justify the presence of the Church in the political arena as a duty of conscience to society. This will be followed by a discussion of the proper role of the Nigerian Church in our country's politics today, showing how this can impact the democratic renewal of Nigeria. Finally, I will close with some suggestions and concluding remarks, focusing especially on how the Church can contribute to more credible elections and hopefully a viable polity in Nigeria.

Clarification of Terms

It will be helpful to preface this discussion with a clarification of the main concepts at issue, namely: Church, politics, conscience, power, morals, and democratic renewal.

Church

The word 'Church' is derived from the Greek New Testament term '*ekklesia*', meaning an "assembly called together" – a term which was employed by the Septuagint in translating the Hebrew *qahal* (assembly), or more specifically *qahal Yahweh* (*ekklesia Kurion*), meaning "assembly of the Lord". In the Pauline corpus and the Acts of the Apostles, *ekklesia* is used in designating "the redeemed community of the new covenant" or, at times, "the sum total of men redeemed through Christ" (cf. Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph.

1:22; 30:10; Phil. 3:6; Col. 1:18).¹ Karl Rahner (1904-1984) outlines six images and concepts necessary for the construction of a theology of the Church, namely, the Church as: “mystery and sacrament of Christ”; “the fullness of Christ and fellowship;” “the body of Christ”; “the people of God”; a “society”; and the herald of “the Kingdom” of God.²

While the word ‘Church’ may refer to the building in which Christians gather for worship, it primarily refers to the assembly of believers. For the purposes of this paper, by ‘Church’ we will simply be designating the Roman Catholic Church here in Nigeria, and, sometimes, more specifically, as this Church is realized in the diocese of Nsukka. My remarks will be applicable to other Christian communities in Nigeria only to the extent that they subscribe to comparable principles.

Politics

The word ‘politics’ comes from the Greek word ‘*polis*’ which means town, city or state. David Power describes politics as “the art of the possible, a matter of responsible action and specific planning for decipherable ends.”³ According to the *Webster’s II New Collegiate Dictionary*, the word ‘politics’ can be used either with the singular or the plural grammatical construction. In its singular construction, ‘politics’ means as follows: the art or science of government; the activities or affairs of a government, politician, or a political party; (a) the conduct or participation in political activities, often professionally; (b) the business, activities or

¹ Viktor Warnch, “Church” in *Sacramentum Verbi: An Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*. Vol.1. Ed. Johannes B. Bauer, New York: Herder & Herder, 1970, (101-116), p101.

² Karl Rahner, “Church” in *Sacramentum Mundi: Encyclopedia of Theology*. Vol.1. Ed. Karl Rahner et al. London: Search Press Ltd., 1973, (317-330), pp. 318-323.

³ David Power. “The Song of the Lord in an Alien Land” *Concilium* 92.Ed. Herman Schmidt & David Power. New York: Herder & Herder, 1974, (85-106), p. 87.

profession of one so involved; the methods or tactics involved in running a government or state. When used with the plural, 'politics' refers to "intrigue or maneuvering within a group"; and also to "one's general position or attitude" regarding political subjects.⁴

All through this paper, the word 'politics' will be employed with a singular grammatical construction to indicate the business of statecraft, the activities of politicians, and the dynamics of the participation of citizens in the management of their state. That is politics in its strict sense. David Power alludes to a "diffused" notion of politics which broadens the concept in such a way that it covers "the whole social dimension of human endeavour;" in which case, it becomes almost synonymous with the common good, which "embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enables individuals, families, and organizations to achieve fulfillment more completely and more expeditiously."⁵

Conscience

For John Henry Newman (1801-1890), conscience is "the essential principle and sanction of Religion in the mind." It implies a relation between the soul and "a something exterior," "superior to itself," a relation to "an excellence which it does not possess, and to a tribunal over which it has no power." It is an "inward monitor". The more closely it is respected and followed, "the clearer, the more exalted, and the more varied its dictates become, and the standard of excellence is ever outstripping, while it guides, one's obedience, a moral conviction is at length obtained of the unapproachable nature as well as the supreme authority of That,

⁴ Webster's II Collegiate Dictionary, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995, p.854.

⁵ Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes*, 74 in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Vol.1. New Revised Edn. New York: Costello, 1998, p981. See also David Power op.cit. pp.87-88.

whatever it is, which is the object of the mind's contemplation."⁶ This is the heart or core of any religious system in Newman's thought; for, as he rhetorically asks: "what is Religion but the system of relations existing between us and a Supreme Power, claiming our habitual obedience...?"⁷ In a similar vein, Vatican Council II teaches that in Conscience "man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey" and that Conscience is "man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."⁸

In a religiously plural polity like Nigeria, conscience (an inborn human endowment) is a kind of natural bridge in moral discourse. Even though conscience is basically religious, as Newman claims, it can also be a moral faculty to the measure of its development: "While Conscience is thus ever the sanction of Natural Religion," Newman argues, "it is, when improved, the rule of Morals also."⁹

Power

Power is simply the "ability or capacity to act or to perform effectively." Used in the plural, it may refer to a "specific capacity, faculty or aptitude"; or to the "strength exerted or capable of being exerted"; or to the "ability or official capacity to exercise control over others..."¹⁰ "Of the infinite desires of man," writes Bertrand Russell, "the chief are the desires for power and glory." These are not identical, though they are closely related: the *emir* or *igwe*, for example, has more glory than power; whereas, the local

⁶ John Henry Newman. *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between AD 1826 and 1843*. Introduction by Katherine Tillmann. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997, pp.18-19.

⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 16 in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. I. New Rsd. Edn. New York: Costello, 1998, p.916. Hereafter, simply *Gaudium et Spes*.

⁹ Ibid. p.20.

¹⁰ Webster's II New Collegiate Dictionary, New York, 1995, p.866.

government chairman or state governor has more power than glory. "As a rule, however," Russell continues, "the easiest way to obtain glory is to obtain power; this is especially the case as regards men who are active in relation to public events."¹¹ Saul D Alinsky, a celebrated American social activist and theorist, laments that the word 'power' has a poor public image. Once it is mentioned, he moans, "it is as though hell has been opened, exuding the stench of the devil's cesspool of corruption. It evokes images of cruelty, dishonesty, selfishness, arrogance, dictatorship, and abject suffering."¹² Thus people would readily cite Lord Acton's dictum that "Power *tends* to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" in disgust. Notwithstanding, Alinsky is quick to note that the corruption of power is not in power itself but in us. "Power is the very essence, the dynamo of life," he avers, "...an essential life force always in operation, either changing the world or opposing change."¹³ In fact, "Mankind has progressed only through learning how to develop and organize instruments of power in order to achieve order, security, morality, and civilized life itself, instead of sheer struggle for physical survival."¹⁴

Power, that is, "organized energy" (Alinsky), is closely related to politics; indeed that is its principal attraction; and most political disputes are essentially quarrels about power relations. According to Bertrand Russell, "the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics."¹⁵ Given this close association of politics with power, it is not surprising that in the public mind in Nigeria, politics is invested with the same kind of opprobrium which Alinsky tells us is associated with power in America. In the

¹¹ Bertrand Russell. *Power: A New Social Analysis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1969, p.11. Hereafter, *Power*.

¹² Saul D. Alinsky. *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p.51. Hereafter, *Rules for Radicals*.

¹³ Ibid. p.51.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.52.

¹⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Power*, 1969, p.12.

mind of most Nigerians, politics evokes intrigue, corruption, endless bickering, back-hand deals, betrayals, tribalism, cronyism, opportunism – nay, whatever else may be said to be amiss with this country! Yet, paradoxically, politics is the very currency of life itself; it is the arena of everyday life in modern society.

Morals

By ‘moral dimension’ in this paper, we refer to the question of right and wrong in political behaviour. Indeed, morality constitutes a meeting point between religion and politics. Helpful in this area is the distinction which the Jewish philosopher, Avishai Margalit, makes between morality and ethics. Morality refers to the universal principles which govern our dealings with humanity in general: our relationship with the stranger. By contrast, ethics deals with the principles of our relationship with those with whom we have special bonds of shared memory and belonging: family, friends, fellow citizens and persons of the same religious faith. The two systems of values have a different tonality: “Morality is greatly concerned, for example, with respect and humiliation... Ethics, on the other hand, is greatly concerned with loyalty and betrayal...”¹⁶ Alexander Skutch explains that there are three classes of activity or attitudes which are appropriate and correspondent with our dealings with the three grades of beings with which we are related: art, for the exploitation of inferior beings; morality, for regulating our relations with beings which are our equals; and religion, to place in the proper relation with that which is superior to ourselves.¹⁷ Thus, politics is an arena for dealing with beings with whom we claim equality; consequently our fellow citizens should be guided by moral principles.

¹⁶ Avishai Margalit. *The Ethics of Memory*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, p.8 as cited by Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*. New York: Schocken Books, 2005, p. 51.

¹⁷ Alexander F. Skutch. *The Golden Core of Religion*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970.

Democratic Renewal

By 'democratic renewal', I simply intend the social reconstruction of Nigeria based on democratic principles. Here, democracy means: a political system characterized by widespread participation of citizens in the management of the affairs of state. According to its dictionary definition, a democracy is: "1. Government exercised either directly by the people or through elected representatives; 2. a political or social unit based on democratic rule; 3. the populace, especially as the primary source of political power; 4. rule by the majority; 5. the principles of social equality and respect for the individual within a community."¹⁸ In speaking of democratic renewal, I imply that where rulers derive their powers directly from the people through periodic elections, they are more likely to listen to them and to look out for their interests.

What Business has the Church with Politics?

Nigeria's recent political history makes the question of the Church's concern with politics rather moot. There is a consensus that Obasanjo's eight-year rule, like the ones preceding him, was a monumental failure. The prognosis for the current three years Yar'Adua-Jonathan presidency has not been vastly different. At the State level, the eight years of Chimaroke Nnamani's governance was equally characterized by similar inability to articulate, much less meet the needs of the citizenry. This string of failures should leave little doubt in everyone's mind about the abject state of politics in our country. This calls for concerted efforts from all stakeholders for national self-redemption.

As an influential social institution endowed with considerable moral clout, the Church's active political involvement ought to be a self-evident, imperative duty. So the question is not *whether* the

¹⁸ Webster's II New Collegiate Dictionary, New York, 1995, p. 301.

Church, as a social body, and individual Christians should play an active role in politics but *how*, and to *what* purpose. A plausible starting point for framing this discourse, therefore, would be an examination of the Church's vision of the political community and of politics itself.

The Second Vatican Council opens *Gaudium et Spes* with an impassioned declaration of solidarity with the "joys and hopes, the grief and anguish" of the poor and of all who are in any way afflicted, affirming that nothing that is "genuinely human" fails to find an "echo" in the Christian heart. What could be more "genuinely human" than politics, the context where everyday life is lived in modern society? Thus the council teaches that the political community or state was born as a result of the realization by individuals, families, and organizations, which make up civil society, that by their unaided efforts, they are incapable of achieving a truly human life; hence the need for a wider community – the state. Thus the state exists for the attainment of the common good, that is, "the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families, and organizations to achieve fulfillment more completely and expeditiously."¹⁹ It further explains that every citizen has both the "right and duty" to promote the common good by "*using his vote*" and by rendering to the state "whatever material or personal services are required for the common good"²⁰ (emphasis added). Such "material and personal services" must include prompt and accurate payment of taxes, utility bills, readiness to serve in the military, Civil Defence Corps, or the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program in Nigeria, for example.

The Council also insists on the "supreme importance" of two things in the context of pluralistic societies. The first is to fashion out a proper relation between the Church and the State. The second is to distinguish "clearly" between the activities of Christians,

¹⁹ Vatican Council II. *Gaudium et Spes*, 74 par.1

²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 75 par.1, 2

whether as individuals or in groups, acting in their own name as citizens of the state and the activities of Christians with their pastors, acting in the name of the Church. It goes on to restate the Gelasian theory of Church and State: the political community and the Church are “autonomous of each other in their own fields”. (The emperor no longer assumes the title of priest, and the priest does not claim royal dignity such that “Christian emperors would need priests for attaining eternal life, and priests would avail themselves of imperial regulations in the conduct of temporal affairs.”²¹) Nevertheless, everywhere and at every time, the Church should have “*true freedom to preach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its task among men without hindrance, and to pass moral judgments on matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it*”²² (emphasis added).

The activities of Christians, as individuals or groups, acting in their own name as citizens in politics is subject to the same moral principles which govern or ought to govern the activities of other citizens in the political arena; and they are individually or collectively accountable as the case may be. However, their activities, as a social body, acting in the name of the Church – with their legitimate pastors – is subject to different moral principles; and the Church bears corporate responsibility for such: “*The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political system. It is at once the sign and safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person*”²³ (emphasis added). Further the Council teaches that “the specific and proper role” of Christians in politics is “to be *a shining example* by their sense of responsibility and dedication to the common good” and by their readiness to “combat injustice and oppression, arbitrary domination and intolerance by individuals or political parties” with

²¹ Pope Gelasius. “The Fourth Tract on the Bond of Anathema,” chap. II (Thiel, pp. 567ff); *ibid.* 177-8.

²² *Gaudium et Spes*, 76 par. 3, 5.

²³ *ibid.* par.2

“integrity and wisdom,” and with the spirit of “sincerity and fairness, of love and of the courage demanded by political life”²⁴ (emphasis added).

Having seen the Church’s teaching on politics and political participation, we may now examine the particularities of the Nigerian political scene which gives a peculiar texture to the task before the Nigerian Church in the field of politics.

Nigerian Politics Today: State of the Nation

The thirty-six states and six geopolitical Zones which define Nigeria’s polity today did not emerge from a growing consensus among her citizens about the nation’s political structure. Rather it is the outcome of a process that was driven by the series of military incursions into the country’s political life. At independence in 1960, Nigeria consisted of four Regions: North (14 Provinces), East (12 Provinces), West (7 Provinces), and Mid-West (2 Provinces). Following the creation of States by the Yakubu Gowon-led administration in 1967 an apparent structural imbalance was introduced into the political structure of the country. The former Northern Region was carved into six States with 41 Divisions; Eastern Region became three States with 37 Divisions; the Western Region emerged with two States and 17 Divisions; while the Mid-West evolved into one State with 10 Divisions. The creation of States which was effected by the Murtala Mohammed – Olusegun Obasanjo administration on February 3, 1976 did nothing to redress the existing political imbalance in the polity. Seven new states were added to the twelve created by General Gowon, giving the North a total of ten States and the South nine. The only visible difference was that the Yoruba (Obasanjo’s people) now had a clear head start over the Igbo (their nearest rival) with four States (Lagos, Oyo, Ogun and Ondo) and a considerable stake in a fifth (Kwara) while the Igbo (with a comparable population) had only

²⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 75, par.5, 6.

two States (Anambra and Imo); and this was in preparation for a new revenue allocation formula (which went into effect prior to the 1979 handover to civilians) making the States the basis for revenue sharing in the country. The present federal structure of the country was decreed into being by General Sani Abacha in 1996. This time, the old North was divided into three Zones with the following structure: North West, 7 States and 186 Local Government Councils; North Central, 6 States and 121 Local Government Councils; North East, 6 States and 112 Local Government Councils, making a total of 19 States and 419 Local Government Councils. By contrast, what was three Regions at independence was now fused together to constitute the “South” and divided into three Zones with the following structure: South West, 6 States and 137 Local Government Councils; South South, 6 States and 123 Local Government Councils; South East, 5 States and 95 Local Government Councils, making a total of 17 States and 355 Local Government Councils.

This has enormous political and economic consequences. Several years ago, Chief J.S.P.C Nwokolo, at a public lecture, declared the existing revenue sharing formula as “unfair” because it “aims to impoverish” some states of the country. He stated:

Thus, prior to the application of 13% derivation principle, states in the Northern part of the country comprising North West, North East and North Central zones took 52% of the revenue shared among the states of the federation, while the local government councils in the same North got 63.9% of all revenue shared among local government councils in the country. As a matter of fact, while the North West got 21% of all revenue shared among the states, the South East zone got only 11%. The figure is 32.4% and 8.8% respectively for the revenues distributed among local government councils in the North West and in the South East. In fact the local government councils in Kano State alone got 7.9% of total revenue shared

to local government councils in the country –nearly as much as the entire South East.²⁵

The explanation for these income disparities is simple: since the North, as a political unit has many more States and Local Government Councils (which are the basis of revenue allocation) it receives, correspondingly, a greater share of the national revenue. Kano, for example, the home state of the late General Sani Abacha, has 86 Local Government Councils while the entire South East Zone a mere 95! The South East which has the least number of States and Local Governments receives correspondingly the least amount of federal revenue.

This raises a number of questions: On what criteria were States and Local Governments created across this country? Were these criteria debated and agreed upon by the various stake-holders in the country? Why is the Revenue Allocation formula tied principally to population which has crippled every attempt to conduct credible census in the country? In the absence of the necessary conversation and consensus, what we have in terms of socio-political structure appears to be a devious imposition by a clique of military officers who seem to have skewed the polity to benefit their kith and kin. This was the “poisoned cup” (Wole Soyinka) which the soldiers bequeathed to politicians when they were forced to beat a reluctant retreat from politics in 1999, a hobbling reality even to this very day.

Nearer home, here in Enugu State, does one find fairness and balance, equal opportunities and distributive justice? Hardly! Enugu was carved out of the old Anambra State on 27 August 1990 by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. Its present political structure was further determined by General Sani Abacha when, on

²⁵ J.S.P Nwokolo, “Convening a National Conference to Fashion a Truly Federal Structure in Nigeria: The Rationale and the Issues” (Unpublished Public lecture, 1998, p.2) as cited by Emeka Ngwoke, “The Role of the Local Church in Nigerian Politics Today” (Lecture at Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha, April 20, 2002), p.8.

October 1, 1996 he severed Abakaliki Senatorial Zone from the former Enugu State to become part of Ebonyi State, readjusted the senatorial districts in the new State and created six new Local Governments therein. By Abacha's military fiat Enugu State came to have 17 Local Governments: ten in the former Enugu Senatorial Zone (which previously had six) and seven in Nsukka Senatorial Zone (which previously had five). By this seemingly simple act of executive power, the former Enugu Senatorial Zone (constituting 59% of the population by 1991 census figures) was now given the political leverage of two-thirds majority (or 66%) by having absolute control of two out of the three emergent Senatorial Zones in the new State. Then the former Nsukka Senatorial Zone (constituting 41 percent of the State by 1991 census figures) was reduced in political clout to the position of a mere one-third by having control and meaningful say only in one of the three new Senatorial Zones. A further political implication of this is that with its control of 10 out of the 17 Local Governments in the State, the former Enugu Senatorial Zone (which has now evolved into Enugu East and Enugu West Senatorial Zones) has only to win the support of one Local Government Council in the former Nsukka Senatorial Zone to emerge with two-thirds majority to win gubernatorial elections in the State. And, without blinking, the victors chose their prize: Isi-Uzo Local Government Council which was severed from kith and kin in the former Nsukka Senatorial Zone (now Enugu North) in order to constitute Enugu East Senatorial Zone.²⁶ The trophy for this *smart* political move I guess should go to Chief Jim Nwobodo who was then the minister of Sports, and to Group Capt. Herbert Orji and Commander James Aneke – both of whom served as state governors in Abacha's government. Further structural modifications of the State were effected under the Chimaroke Nnamani administration but since they were done without the

²⁶ See Emeka Ngwoke, *Politics and Religion: A Christian Perspective*, Enugu: Snaap, 2001, pp 23-4 for my suggestion on what could have been a fair allocation of Councils to the various Senatorial Zones in the State.

requisite constitutional backing, one need not devote space and time to their analysis and evaluation here.

So how does one evaluate the incumbent Enugu State Governor, Sullivan Chime? On what criterion should he be assessed? Of course, one must not fail to acknowledge noticeable improvements in the conduct of the business of government in the state since the beginning of his administration. One must also note, for the record, the significant transformation of the state capital through an ambitious road construction program. In my view, however, the most important yardstick of assessment is the lowest common denominator: justice, the basic foundational virtue of society. There is a constitutional requirement for the governor or president or even chairman of local council to be fair to all the component units of the state, country or council area. Section 14 (4) of the 1999 Constitution provides that the composition of the Government of a State or local government council, or any of their agencies and the conduct of such Government or council shall be conducted in a manner that recognizes the “diversity” of the people within its jurisdiction and fulfils the need to promote a sense of “belonging and loyalty” among all the peoples of this country. Subsequently, we shall examine how Governor Chime has fared in abiding by this constitutional provision, which seems to make so much political sense.

What can the Church do?

The Church’s contribution to Nigeria’s democratic renewal can be encapsulated in five important tasks involving identity politics, the creating of a viable work ethic and an ethic of responsibility, solidarity in human promotion, and the conduct of credible elections.

The Politics of Identity: Who Are We?

One of the enduring negative effects of colonialism in Africa is the profound self-doubt, the inferiority complex, which it inscribed into

the self-consciousness of the African. The colonial order was sustained by the creation of a virtual world, a mental frame, which the African inhabited perforce. In this virtual world, the African's values, culture, religious beliefs and practices were subjected to relentless denigration and devaluation. As the Palestinian dissident scholar, Edward Said, explains, neither imperialism nor colonialism is "a simple act of accumulation." Both are supported by "impressive ideological formations" which include notions that "certain territories and peoples *require* and beseech domination." Thus, the vocabulary of nineteenth-century imperial culture is choke-full with concepts like "inferior," or "subject-races," "dependency," "expansion," and "authority,"²⁷ (emphasis in original). These ideological formations are still very much in place, evidence of which is manifest in the condescension which often characterizes the West's attitude toward Africa, and in the stereotypes about Africa exhibited in Western cultural productions like novels, films, documentaries, and the mass media. Africans, I submit, for the most part, still inhabit that virtual world of colonial creation, almost as a matter of course: witness our insatiable appetite for Western goods, artifacts, music, dress styles, foods, names (!), etc., even when something better or comparable is locally available. While this is admittedly a general problem, I simply wish to argue that in Nsukka Diocese, it assumes a peculiar texture which needs to be addressed if we, as a Church, as a people, will be able to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's democratic renewal.

Nsukka is part of the Igbo, one of Nigeria's top three ethnic nationalities – the Hausa-Fulani, and the Yoruba being the other two. In his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe observes that Nigeria has an "*Igbo problem*" (emphasis in original).²⁸ What Achebe was referring to is the resentment which other ethnic groups in Nigeria feel toward the Igbo. If I may

²⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage, 1994, p.9.

²⁸ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1984.

borrow the Professor's vocabulary, I think that one can safely say that Enugu state, as well as Ndigbo, has an "*Nsukka Problem*" – by which I wish to draw attention to the obvious disdain or contempt which other communities in Igbo land have toward our people. There is ample proof of this in everyday occurrences ranging from mere banter to serious confrontations. Take for instance, when one, no matter the age, is referred to as "*nwa Nsukka*," (child of Nsukka); not as a term of endearment; rather akin to an African American man being referred to as a 'boy' – a racial slur with origins in slavery. Another slur with equally visible currency is the quip, "*ina eme nno ka nwa Nsukka*" (you are just behaving like a child of Nsukka); the intended put-down is obvious. Even in the supposed praise, "*inaghi eme ka ndi Nsukka*" (you do not behave like Nsukka people), the atmosphere is thick with condescension.

Nsukka's Southern neighbours gained an advantage over her in colonial times because the explorers and missionaries got to them first; so they were first to benefit from the colonial order in education, commerce, and emerging opportunities. Nearness to the River Niger explains this. What they have done over the decades is to seize the levers of power and use them to consolidate their lead. Economic power in our country is generally associated with proximity to big markets like Onitsha, and access to government. Since Nsukka people have neither had sustained access to government nor been proximate to large markets, we are poor and, therefore, also expected to remain pliant and willing servants in perpetuity.

Unfortunately, we have been behaving in this matter like the Igbo have been in Nigeria – a people resented by other ethnic groups in the country, yet fractious at every instance, and notoriously adept at undercutting one another and undermining their own collective opportunities and well-being. We may learn a thing or two from the Jews about being a persecuted, despised minority. Self-acceptance is fundamental to dealing with this complex reality. The Jews, despite what millions think about them, are proud to be Jew. Most importantly, the Jews, despite all internal

disputes, are always looking out for one another. In their years of dispersion in Europe, Moses Maimonides noted that despite their poverty, they had “never seen nor heard” of a Jewish community that does not have “an alms fund”. Jonathan Sacks adds the following explanation: “Powerless, stateless and often living under conditions of great poverty, Jews throughout the centuries of their dispersion created a communal equivalent of a welfare state. They did so voluntarily, because it was a *mitzvah* (religious deed), because it was what Jews do, and because they knew that no one else would do it for them.”²⁹

Our future as a people may well depend on our ability to synergize and pursue our common purpose through a possible uniform political platform or agenda. It may be possible, as Reinhold Niebuhr observes, to establish justice between individuals within a group entirely through “moral and rational suasion”; however, in inter-group relations, this is virtually “impossible.” Such relations are “predominantly political” and not “ethical” and thus can only be determined by the “proportion of power” which each group possesses at least as much as by “rational appraisal” of their competing claims.³⁰

Establishing a Viable Work Ethic.

When in 1983, Chinua Achebe published *The Trouble with Nigeria* he made a highly original contribution to the complex task of analyzing the ills of our country. Two decades later, his work still rings true, making each reading of him a worthwhile investment of time and energy. Achebe’s principal argument is captured in his opening sentence: “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.”³¹ This is surely an exaggeration, which

²⁹ Jonathan Sack, *To Heal a Broken World*. New York: Schocken, 2005, p.31.

³⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, New York: Scribner, 1960, pp. xxii-xxiii.

³¹ Chinua Achebe, *op.cit.* p.1.

Achebe will be the first to grant. The problem is that like all exaggerations there are facts which it ignores. In the body of his work, Achebe deals with a myriad of issues plaguing our country: tribalism, corruption, false self-image, indiscipline, lack of patriotism, the Igbo problem, etc. But he left out what I think should have been given prominence and serious attention, namely the absence of a viable work ethic. Work must be the basic building block for the renewal of our country; for, as Adam Smith has shown, work is the primary source of the wealth of nations. Smith defines labour as “the first price” and “the original purchase money” that was paid for all things: “It was not by gold or by silver, but by labour, that all the wealth of the world was originally purchased...”³² Besides, work seems to me to be a more important category of social analysis than leadership. The point is that by focusing so pointedly on leadership, one unwittingly provides easy alibi for people to duck responsibility for the state of the nation by blaming every ill on our leaders. Moreover, it encourages the delusional expectation of a political messiah who will one day emerge and, hopefully, do away with all our difficulties.

Nigeria’s march toward national renewal should start by addressing our people’s attitude to work and the remuneration thereof. The Nigerian work ethic, especially in the public sector, leaves much to be desired. Tales of “missing” files which disappear only to reappear once the itching hands of the relevant civil servants have been greased are too common to be recounted here. Top civil servants routinely demand and collect bribes upfront from contractors as a *sine qua non* condition for processing their payment files for jobs already completed. The case of the Nigeria Police is perhaps the most appalling. A good number of them seem not to be interested in fighting crime and providing security of life and property to Nigerians but simply in making a living off the society by flaunting their uniforms and service rifles. Similarly, the

³² Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, New York: The Modern Library, 1937. 1965, p.30.

Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) organizes entrance exams to our universities and polytechnics, leaks the question papers, makes millions selling them to candidates, and cancels the results in protest. Can you beat that?³³

Work, according to biblical revelation, is part of the original order of creation. By working, humans cooperate with the Creator in bringing creation to greater perfection while they improve themselves and provide for their livelihood. Human beings were given the divine mandate to care for the earth (Gen 2:15), allotted a six-day work-week and ordered to take the seventh day off to rest (Exod. 20:9f). Work and labour relations are governed by serious moral obligations which the Church can help bring to people's consciousness. From the theology and purpose of work, certain moral obligations follow. First, work is a duty; since it is the usual means humans have of provisioning for themselves and for their families. Second, one is bound to prepare conscientiously for one's profession; hence one must acquire all the skills necessary for diligently carrying out one's profession. Third, one is morally obliged to render those services for which one was hired; worker negligence, carelessness, and dereliction of duty are sinful.³⁴

The other side of the labour question in Nigeria is that of wages. Nigerians must rank among the lowest wage earners in the world: the national minimum wage is 7,500 naira (\$50 US dollars!). Yet, a pair of jeans costs between 2,500 and 3000 naira. In contrast, our country's public servants are said to be the most highly compensated in the world (apart from their now habitual practice of helping themselves to the public till)! Bad as it is, the

³³ The author addressed this issue in details in the following article: Emeka Ngwoke, "Work, Workers and Wages: Between Employers and Employees" *The Torch*. Vol. 127, 2004, p.45.

³⁴ See C. Henry Peschke, *Christian Ethics: A Representation of Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Vol. II, Dublin: C. Goodliffe Neale, 1978 pp. 485-513 for detailed theological discussion of the morality of work. See also Austin Fagothey, *Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, St Louis, MO: C. V. Mosby, 1963 pp 390-403 for a similar discussion of the subject on philosophical grounds.

existing national minimum wage is often not paid in the private sector. The prevailing practice is characterized by "the casualization of labour," i.e. the exploitation of the nation's bloated labour market to hire and fire at will. Apart from refusing to pay the niggardly minimum wage, many private sector employers sometimes hire people, keep them working for months, and then fire them without pay! Many employees keep working in order not to lose the accumulated credits, and in the hope of one day getting paid. It is worthwhile to point out to unscrupulous employers that they have an obligation to pay just wages. Pope Leo XIII, in *Rerum Novarum*, teaches that even though workers and their employers may freely negotiate wages, there is a requirement of "natural justice" which supersedes any bargains voluntarily struck in such a way that the worker's wage ought not to be insufficient "for the bodily needs of a well behaved worker". Should such a worker, having no alternative and fearing a worse condition, be compelled to accept harder conditions imposed by the employer, such a worker "is the victim of violence against which justice cries out."³⁵

The Church does not exist for itself; rather it exists as a service to the human community. Hence, Vatican II Council speaks of the Church as a "sign and instrument" of the unity of the entire human family. The Church can help the course of Nigeria's democratic renewal and social reconstruction by helping her citizens to develop a proper work ethic. This she can do by helping to revive agriculture, for instance, and thereby restoring dignity to manual work. Hunger is a serious problem in our country and billions in scarce foreign exchange are spent every year in importing food. In *A Listening Church*, Elochukwu Uzukwu argues that instead of deepening Africa's dependency, those with priestly and religious vocations "must be educated to lead the continent back to her lost dignity" by guiding the course of Africa's social

³⁵ Pope Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum*, 45.

reconstruction just as Europe's agricultural development was led by medieval monasteries.³⁶

The issue here is whether the Nigerian Church is ready to lead the nation to find her bearing in agricultural production? Can each of our parishes become a fulcrum around which farmers can be organized into cooperatives for higher productivity through the use of improved technologies, high-yield seeds, and easier access to capital? Can each parish maintain a pilot farm, where farmers can come to learn better farming techniques? Then there is the whole issue of wages. The Church has never been famous for paying good wages to her employees. Thus, in a tone of contrition the fathers of the 1994 African Synod acknowledged that "The churches in Africa are also aware that, insofar as their own internal affairs are concerned, justice is not always respected with regard to those men and women who are at their service."³⁷ Can we turn this statement from sheer *mea culpa* into concrete action to improve the welfare of Church staff: catechists, drivers, cooks, stewards, etc? Can the Church pioneer economic justice for the people by eliminating the huge income disparities between priests of parishes in the urban centres and those in the rural countryside – thereby ensuring "fundamentally the same" remuneration for clergy and Church personnel working in the "same circumstances?"³⁸

Establishment of an Ethic of Responsibility

One of the major symptoms of the failure of the inherited colonial state structure all across Africa is the inability to develop appropriate control mechanisms to ensure public accountability. Where accountability is lacking, a culture of impunity is born. Life

³⁶ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. New York: Orbis, 1996, p.98. Henceforth, *A Listening Church*.

³⁷ "Message of the Synod" 43 in *Africa Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, (72-86), p.81.

³⁸ Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 20.

itself, says Jonathan Sacks, is God's call to responsibility; for we are called "to make a difference," to "mend the fractured world," one day at a time, to make it a place of "justice and compassion" where the cry of the wronged and the vulnerable are "heard" and "heeded."³⁹ The sense of responsibility is usually born in close quarters: in the family and in the community. We all instinctively look out for our own. The bane of the modern state in Africa is its failure to inspire this sense of responsibility characteristic of the community. Our various religious communities may be helpful in breaking down the wall of distance and anonymity characteristic of the post-colonial state in free fall. For, as Harold Kushner observes, true religion redeems us from loneliness by teaching us to see our neighbours as "ourselves, to be aware of their humanity, their fears and feelings" and also cures our loneliness by "reaching out" to our neighbours.⁴⁰

That is what a true Christian faith offers us: it broadens our perspective and gives us a cosmopolitan vision of life. This is the moral vision behind some of the most poignant parables of Jesus: the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-36), the last judgment (Matt. 25: 31-46), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). Thus in our neighbour we find a brother or a sister, a collaborator and not a competitor. This holistic vision doesn't seem to be the underpinning principle of governance here in Enugu state –given the lop-sidedness evident in the allocation of government positions and patronage. A few examples will suffice.

There are three Senatorial Zones in the state, namely, Enugu West, Enugu East and Enugu North. Whereas the Governor, Secretary to Government, Attorney General, Accountant General, the Chief Judge, the Chief Registrar, the Deputy President of Senate are all from the Governor's Zone; in choosing his 22 Commissioners the Governor appoints 10 from his Senatorial Zone, 5 from Enugu East, and 7 from Enugu North. Similarly, when he

³⁹ Jonathan Sacks, *op.cit.* p.5.

⁴⁰ Harold Kushner, *Who Needs God*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1990, pp.102-3.

appoints 15 Local Government liaison officers 12 are from his Zone, 3 from Enugu East and *none* from Enugu North. Out of the three State-owned tertiary institutions in the State, the sole campus cited in Enugu North – the Adada campus of Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUTII), was forcibly closed by the government of Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani and is yet to be reopened. Yet, there is a federal character provision in our nation's constitution, which the Governor swore to defend! Even abstracting from such a constitutional provision, is the picture I have just painted not quite obscene? Where is decency, fairness, balance? My reading of the situation is this: being a product of a morally deficient process, namely the sham elections of 2007, and having been mentored by Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, a man with supreme disdain for decency and fairness, the Governor finds it difficult to distance himself from Nnamani's parochial style of administration. Is it not said that *ejo ihe gbar' ahua owo omenal'* (when society abides an evil deed beyond one year, it becomes a tradition)?

The Church must step forward to correct such aberrations. If one is governor, one must serve the interest of the whole state with equity and fairness. We must all rise to our collective responsibilities in this matter. In his book, *The Question of German Guilt*, Karl Jaspers insists that there is a solidarity among humans which makes each "co-responsible" for every wrong and every injustice in the world "especially the crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge." If I fail to do what I can to stop or prevent those evils, "I too am guilty."⁴¹ Jaspers calls this "metaphysical guilt" as opposed to "moral guilt." But, as Jonathan Sacks rightly observes, one does not need to invoke metaphysics here. This guilt flows from such biblical imperatives as, "Do not stand still when your neighbour's life is in danger" (Lev.19:16). "There is a duty to intervene to prevent wrong when we can,

⁴¹ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, p.36 as cited by Jonathan Sacks, op.cit. p.123.

regardless of who commits it and against whom it is committed, sometimes by physical action, at others by argument, reason and persuasion. Its simplest expression was formulated by Holocaust historian Yehudah Bauer: *Thou shalt not be a bystander.*⁴²

It seems that a good part of the problem stems from a widely held view, which is seldom publicly expressed, that moral norms do not apply in the field of politics; such that, in politics, many will do what they would ordinarily disapprove of, and shrink from, in their private lives. That is disingenuous; and also not helpful to society. In fact, it would deny to politics a redemptive character. Vatican II Council, after noting that Christians are citizens of the earthly and the heavenly cities, urges them to "perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel." It teaches that one of the "gravest errors" of our time is the "dichotomy" between the faith many profess and their daily lives; a scandal which was fiercely denounced by the Old Testament prophets and which Christ himself, with greater force, threatened with "severe punishment": there should be no such "pernicious opposition" between "professional and social activity" and religious life.⁴³

Let it be said, that in this respect that, in Enugu state, we are yet to better the record of the administration of Dr Okesilieze Nwodo through his policy of "triangular equilibrium" rooted in the political philosophy of "meri-quota-crazy," that is, the judicious application of merit and quota as the guiding principles in the distribution of government patronage. Whatever one may think of that regime, one cannot fault that policy for constitutionality, political sense, and moral sensitivity. That policy was not born out of political naivety; rather, it was an attempt by a serious-minded Christian to bring conscience, enlightened by Gospel principles, to bear on statecraft. Such policies should be taken up, improved upon, and updated for the political health of our state and for the well-being of all her citizens. By contrast, we should banish from

⁴² Jonathan Sacks, op.cit. p.123.

⁴³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.

history Governor Nnamani's policy of exclusion, cronyism, and the privatization – nay criminalization - of the state and of politics in general. For as Joseph Ratzinger rightly insists, "To bring to public acceptance as valid the standing of morality, the standing of God's commandments, must be the core of responsible political activity."⁴⁴ Similarly the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argues that living in "conformity" with one's conscience on political issues is "the way" Christians offer their contribution through political life so that society will become "more just and more consistent with the dignity of the human person."⁴⁵ Indeed, Christians in Nigeria, led by her legitimate pastors, should model for our countrymen and women the virtues of responsible citizenship by being the first to show respect for the rule of law through prompt payment of taxes, observance of traffic regulations, queuing up for services in public places, and following the due process in all transactions.

Solidarity in Human Promotion

One of the most urgent needs of Nsukka, as a people and as a diocese, is the development of human capital. So far, we have been trailing far behind our competitors, in society and in the Church, in the production of skilled and highly qualified personnel. This is not entirely surprising since our people are generally poor and, therefore, often unable to afford the high cost of advanced training and graduate education. In view of this, it is critically important for us to be proactive in devising effective and cooperative strategies for rapid human capital development. We can count on the fact that

⁴⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*. New York: Crossroad, 1988, p. 151.

⁴⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Doctrinal Notes on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002), 6: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, vatican City, 2002, p.13 cited in *Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine*, Ed. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Washington D.C: USCCB, 2006, p.245.

the diocese is gifted with highly intelligent, disciplined, and diligent young men and women who enter the priesthood and religious life in huge numbers every year. Reports from our regional major seminaries indicate that our seminarians have, in the past two decades of our existence as a diocese, continued to hold high the flags of academic and moral excellence. Unfortunately, however, despite these early intimations of talent and promise which are witnessed in these young men, we have often been unable to push them forward, after priestly ordination, to the full blossoming of their evident potentials. I think the main reason why we have come to this sad pass is the weak financial base of the diocese, and our inability to maximally exploit available opportunities.

The existing scholarship scheme for the high-school education of indigent children in this diocese is a most laudable innovation and a tangible demonstration of the Church's commitment to human capital development. It should be continued and, if possible, expanded to bring up more people. However, it does not supplant the need for better educated clergy, responding to the needs of an increasingly more sophisticated Christ's faithful. The Second Vatican Council urges the bishop to be "solicitous" for the welfare of his priests – "spiritual, intellectual and material"; to encourage them to take courses "intended to deepen their knowledge of ecclesiastical studies" and of the more important "social questions" or "new methods of pastoral activity."⁴⁶

A Church that will lead Nigeria's march towards democratic renewal needs a full complement of well-trained and specialized clergy. As a new national Catholic University gets up and running, as state governments return schools to voluntary agencies, and invite the Church to partnership in providing quality education to Nigeria's teeming populations, there is greater pressure for qualified clergy and lay faithful. The Nigerian Church should give serious thought to expanding the facilities at the Catholic Institute

⁴⁶ Vatican II Council, *Christus Dominus*, 16, par.3.

of West Africa (CIWA) and other Catholic tertiary institutions for the education of both clergy and lay people. Appropriate mechanisms should be established in the various dioceses to take full advantage of the extant opportunities for competitive scholarships in overseas universities for the specialized training of both categories of Christ's faithful. At the university of Notre Dame, for example, such scholarships are available twice every year (for the laity) and three times per year (for the clergy) – literally *begging* to be taken.

Credible Elections and National Democratic Renewal

While it is true that periodic elections do not constitute the essence of democracy, it seems obvious that without credible elections, national democratic renewal will be a virtual impossibility. In the course of the last three election cycles Nigerians witnessed the systematic subversion of the electoral will by a powerful clique of politicians and their retired military collaborators. Progressively, the people have shown palpable election fatigue and frustration; sometimes preferring not to vote at all than to be so brutally assaulted. The challenge before us is to win back the people from this kind of moral cynicism and to imbue them with sufficient enthusiasm about the electoral process to be able to cast their votes and protect their ballots until they are counted and tallied. What should the Church be doing in this regard?

The first Synod of Bishops for Africa (1994) was on target in articulating what the Church ought to do to facilitate the democratic renewal of African nations. In Proposition 56, the Synod stresses the urgent necessity of establishing the rule of law across the continent, and invites the Church to “intensify” the education of consciences in order to establish political systems that “respect” the “human dignity” and “fundamental freedoms” of citizens.⁴⁷ This is

⁴⁷ Synod of Bishops for Africa, “Propositions” 56. *African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*. Ed. Africa Faith & Justice Network. New York: Orbis, 1996, (87-108), p106. Henceforth, *African Synod*.

only the first step. Whereas the clergy should be politically well-informed and proactive while remaining non-partisan, the laity, to the measure of their talents, should become active in partisan politics, and, where possible, seek elective public offices as a potent way of taking Gospel values into the very heart of society. As they venture into public life they should be instructed in the principles of the Church's social teachings, which would require of them five levels of conversion, if they are to be morally profitable in public service. As outlined by Bishop T. Bacani of Manila, Philippines they are as follows: an option of "commitment" to the "common good" – above personal or group interests; commitment to "honesty and integrity" in public service; an understanding of the "universal destination" of earthly goods (the social obligation of ownership); "conversion" from consumerism; and a "profound understanding" of the "value of human work" as creative of "Christian humanism" and of a society built on "solidarity, justice and brotherhood."⁴⁸ Insistence on these five levels of conversion impacted on the outcome of the celebrated February 7 1986 elections in the Philippines.

In December 1985, Cardinal Jamie Sin and his auxiliary bishops had issued a pastoral letter, "A Call to Conscience," admonishing the people on their political responsibilities: "Participation in these coming elections is not only a political act. It is an act of Christian faith. We should participate in this electoral process as Christians... Our Christian faith must be lived out not only in the privacy of our consciences and in the sanctuary of our Churches but also in our effort to make our country a place where human dignity is respected, and peace, the fruit of justice and love prevails."⁴⁹ Furthermore, in a joint pastoral letter issued in January 1986, the conference of Philippine Catholic bishops made four demands on the people: that they "should vote"; that such voting should be according to their "conscience" and "enlightened

⁴⁸ Bishop T. Bacani, *The Church and Politics*. Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian, 1987, p.34.

⁴⁹ Bishop T. Bucani, *op.cit.* pp. 69-70.

judgment”; that the polls should be kept “clean, honest and free”; that they should exercise “unwavering and massive vigilance” all through the elections.⁵⁰ When eventually the electoral process was subverted by President Marcos the conference of Catholic bishops met on February 14, one week after the polls, deliberated and came to the damning verdict: “*In our considered judgment the polls were unparalleled in the fraudulence of their conduct. Yet, despite these evil acts, we are morally certain the people’s will for change has been truly manifested*”⁵¹ (emphasis in original). Consequently, a government not founded on “the mandate of the people”⁵² should be resisted. The people have a “serious moral obligation”⁵³ to compel the government to respect its will, though in a non-violent way: “If the people agreed with the judgment of the bishops regarding the conduct of the elections, they should gather together in their respective Christian communities *to pray together, reason together, decide together, always to the end that the truth prevails, that the will of the people be fully respected.*”⁵⁴ The rest is history: the government of Marcos fell; and the dictator went into exile.

The Nigerian electorate needs to be persuaded that electoral apathy is not an option in dealing with the challenges of creating a credible electoral process; rather it plays into the hands of grasping politicians who would have an easier task of perpetuating electoral fraud if the voters simply stayed away.

Lessons from Anambra State

As the nation moves closer to the 2011 elections, the Church in Nigeria should keep to heart the words of the fathers of the 1994 Synod of Bishops for Africa: “*democracy should become one of the principal routes along which the Church travels together with the*

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.71.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.83.

⁵² Ibid. p.84.

⁵³ Ibid. p.85.

⁵⁴ Loc.cit.

people. Hence education toward the common good as well as toward a respect for pluralism will be one of the pastoral tasks which are a priority for our times”⁵⁵ (emphasis added). We must prioritize adequate and timely preparations for the oncoming elections and should appropriate the lessons from the difficulties and shortcomings of the previous elections. The recent gubernatorial election in Anambra State, despite its obvious deficiencies, is clear enough indication that credible elections can be conducted in Nigeria; and that, at last, the voice of voters will prevail. An important gain in the Anambra election was the counting, collation, and announcement of results at the polling booths. *The Guardian’s* editorial said: “The fact that the results were announced at every polling booth was however, a major strategy that convinced not only the people of Anambra State but the crowd of local and international observers that the election, in spite of its limitations was intended to be free and fair...”⁵⁶ One must insist that an equivalent provision be made for all subsequent elections, especially as electoral reforms get underway.

It was not all positive, however, for there were some potentially explosive problems, the most prominent of which was the role of the clergy in that election. Remarking on the victory of Governor Obi at the polls, an evidently elated woman argues that whether the candidate was sold to the people “through outright campaigns from the pulpit,” or by parish priests “literally directing their parishioners to vote for the one who carried the day” the people’s choice was “evident’ in the return of the incumbent, Governor Peter Obi, as winner of the vote.”⁵⁷ The answer to the misguided zeal of this star-struck voter is provided by Okey Ndibe who felt “thoroughly ashamed” to hear of priests campaigning for

⁵⁵ Synod of Bishops for Africa, “Message of the Synod”, 34.

⁵⁶ “Lessons from Anambra Election” Editorial, *The Guardian*, Feb. 15, 2010. <http://odili.net/news/source2010/Feb/15/37.html> (accessed on Feb., 18, 2010).

⁵⁷ Blossom Chukwu, “And there was a great calm in Anambra State” in *The Guardian* Feb., 15, 2010, <http://odili.net/news/source/2010/Feb/15/36.html> (accessed Feb., 18, 2010).

Obi from the pulpit; an action which he characterizes as “scandalous” and “dangerous.”⁵⁸ Ndibe is quite correct and seems to have a good grasp of his Catholic faith. For the priest on the pulpit is no longer a private citizen; he is acting in *persona Christi*, an official minister of the Church, and, therefore, should not be promoting a *partisan* political agenda.⁵⁹ Such indiscretion can only hurt the Church’s credibility.

Conclusions

This paper tried to outline the Church’s time-tested teaching on the relation of Church and State, and to use this as a template for elucidating what roles the Church in Nigeria can, and ought to, play as a facilitator of the nation’s unsteady steps toward democratic renewal. After explaining the leading concepts in our discourse – Church, politics, conscience, power, moral dimension, and democratic renewal – I went on to propose the thesis that the specific contribution which the Church brings to politics is the moral dimension, a critical ingredient that has been lacking in Nigerian politics. I tried to justify the presence of the Church, as a social body, in the political arena; and of Christians, as citizens, in partisan politics, stressing their expected specific contribution to politics, in accordance with the mind of the Second Vatican Council. I then portrayed the Nigerian political scene, emphasizing the existing structural problems which hobble the nation’s march

⁵⁸ Okey Ndibe, “Anambra’s ‘Verdict 2010’ as Lesson and Revenge” in *Daily Sun*, February 10, 2010. (<http://odili.net/news/source/2010/feb/9/521> (accessed Feb., 10, 2010).

⁵⁹ As a general rule, the Church prohibits the clergy from participating in partisan politics; although in specific cases and under special circumstances and exception may be made to this rule. Such seems to have been the case with three American priests, Gabriel Richard (1823-25), Robert J Cornell (1975-79), and Robert F Drinan, SJ (1970-1980) who, at various times, served in the Congress of the United States until Pope John Paul II ordered a general recall of all clergy from political offices in 1980 (cf. www.nytimes.com/2009/05/12/us/politics/12cornell.html).

toward national integration and democratic renewal. The rest of the paper consists of five areas focus in the Church's facilitation of national democratic renewal, encapsulated in the following tasks: self-definition, establishment of a viable work ethic, and of an ethic of responsibility, solidarity in human promotion, and the facilitation of the conduct of credible elections. In these I took my bearing from the situation in the Nsukka diocese.

I am under no illusion that those who harbour instinctive aversion for a politically active and visible Church are won over by my arguments. But, is there really any alternative in the matter? In a higher world things might be different; but here, to be a witnessing Church is to be politically active and visible. Politics that is submitted to the leaven of Gospel principles becomes a redeeming exercise.

Nevertheless, I conclude by emphasizing that a church which hopes to be politically active, through a vibrant laity, a church wishing to lead the march toward our national democratic renewal, must be prepared for a completely new way of being church. A church that asks the laity to be politically proactive and decisive cannot afford to continue to restrict them to the traditionally docile roles of "pray, pay, and obey". The present monarchical style of ecclesiastical administration owes more to the refinements of Roman jurisprudence than to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council, through its teaching on the People of God and Episcopal collegiality, has recovered for our time the primitive spirit of being church: co-responsibility in all aspects of the life and mission of the Church. So, as the lay faithful are prepared for a more active role in society and politics, they must take a more active voice in ecclesiastical affairs. As Elochukwu Uzukwu observes, "The style of ministry" in a Church that "exists to proclaim and bear witness to the Reign of God.... is ... the most eloquent testimony of the emergence of an alternative society in the face of the dictatorships and the spirit of competition and

domination which characterize governance and business in Africa and the world.”⁶⁰

The church that will be equal to the challenges of the present moment must be one that listens. Mark Attebury, after lamenting the overriding tendency to ignore good advice, recommends five important people to whom we should listen: those who “*disagree with us*” – otherwise, our ideas will never be challenged and, if we are wrong, we will never get it right; those who “*love us*”; those who “*have achieved the kind of success we are longing for*”; people who “*demonstrate wisdom*”; and those who “*know and love God’s word in Scripture*”⁶¹ (emphasis added).

Nothing that I have said about Nigeria’s democratic renewal can come easy; they will be won by a daily, unyielding commitment and fidelity to the Risen Lord, the one who died and rose from the dead for our salvation. This renewal must start with individuals making a deep personal commitment and exerting themselves to win others over to the noble but difficult task ahead. I find no better expression of the kind of commitment to democratic renewal required in Nigeria than this statement found in the office a martyred missionary in Zimbabwe.

I won’t give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till he stops me. And, when he comes for his own, he will recognize me ...my banner will be clear!”⁶²

⁶⁰ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, p.104.

⁶¹ Mark Atteberry, *The Samson Syndrome: What You Can Learn from the Baddest Boy in the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003, pp. 34-37.

⁶² Quoted by Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus*, Aylsbery, England: Alpha, 1996, pp.29-30.

BOOK REVIEW

Shawn M. Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Human Being*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010, xi+186.

Enfleshing Freedom is a narrative at once passionate and suffused with critical reflection: an artistic combination of crippling and dehumanizing physical captivity with promethean triumph of the indomitable universal human spirit. The focus of the narrative is the “marked” body of enslaved women in America whose colour, gender, productive and reproductive potentials were priced property in a dominant slave economy. The intention of the hurting narrator, Shawn M. Copeland, is captured on p. 7: “the body provokes theology”. Phenomenologist, Paul Ricœur, said somewhere “the symbol gives rise to thought”. Copeland’s focus on the marked and gendered “body” gives rise to an interesting approach to Christian anthropology: introducing renewal in the discussion of being graced and every woman (and man) being fully human in the image of God.

“Body” for the author is primal or “originary” symbol. “Body” or “flesh”, precisely the flesh of enslaved “black” women, constitutes a hermeneutical site for memorialising historically exploited bodies of women of colour and poor whites by “empire” and “slavocracy”. The narrative of the horrors of slavery, the graphic imagery of the travail of the female flesh transiting the Atlantic (the Middle Passage), undergoing torture in plantations, being subjected to lynching and racism, cannot leave theology neutral. The story of the ritual passage of “black women” carefully positioned by the author side by side with the first century lynching of Jesus on the Cross “incriminates theological anthropology”. How could Christians who define humans as image of God end up justifying and participating in such dehumanizing practice? Readers of this book would have missed the point, according to the author, if the narratives evoke only feelings of pity. Rather, Copeland insists that the narrative “imposes a praxis of solidarity in the concrete, in the here and now” (p. 52). The narratives are a

necessary “dangerous” re-membering that must lead to radical transformation of the conditions that produce such inhumanity.

The stories, drawn mostly from the recollections of women, are not completely new to those familiar with African American theology. Nevertheless, readers will find the graphic imageries very disturbing. The author clearly uses the narrative style to reinvent theological anthropology: a doctrine that was not only severely tested but radically “desecrated” by slavery (p. 24). For instance, the story of Livinia Bell stolen as an infant and held in bondage is one among the many stories that read like an excerpt from a “Martyrology of Black Freedom”! Bell provides the quintessential narrative of “en-fleshing freedom.” From age fourteen she made series of attempts to escape from captivity into freedom; and she paid the price with her flesh: both of her ears were slit; she was branded with hot iron on her left hand and on the stomach; the little finger of her right hand was cut off with an axe; she underwent fixing in a ‘buck’, i.e. “doubling her in two, until her legs were passed over her head, where they were kept with a stick passed across the back of her neck” and whipped in this position (p.115). The conclusion Copeland draws is predictable: “These accounts bear poignant comparison not only to the persecution of Christians but to the torture and crucifixion of Jesus Christ” (p. 116). Livinia Bell, and other accounts provided in this book, prove the relevance of the author’s clear focus on fundamental renewal in Christian anthropology – “body” that is the image of God anywhere and anytime, especially the “marked” body of black woman, triumphs over all stereotyping in order to mediate divine revelation and enable human-social relationship. In this vision of body, insight is gained into the practice of solidarity; and differences of gender, race and sexuality instead of provoking racism, lynching and entrenched patriarchal dominance rather reveal the creativity of the Triune God. The community gathered by and in the name of Jesus of Nazareth to celebrate the Eucharistic, the “mystical body of Christ” that excludes no one, is profoundly ordered and transformed in the celebration.

This book is first of all a must for scholars conversant with and preoccupied over the renewal of foundational Christian theology, Christology, ecclesiology, Eucharistic theology and practice, and of course Christian anthropology. It will be of great use to pastoral agents and caregivers interested in processing healing, the healing of scarred and abused women; the healing women who have been assaulted and violated “sexually, mentally, and physically” and who must reclaim their fully humanity by honouring their flesh.

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Shawn M. Copeland. <i>Enfleshing Freedom : Body, Race, and Human Being</i> . Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010, xi+186. Reviewer: Elochukwu Uzukwu, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA.	